

Minnesota Child Protection Workforce Stability in the Context of System Reform: Region 9 Quantitative Findings

Kristine Piescher, PhD
Traci LaLiberte, PhD
Elizabeth Snyder, MSW
Sandra Ayoo, MA

Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW)
School of Social Work, University of Minnesota

Acknowledgements

Researchers at the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare acknowledge and express gratitude for the work of numerous individuals and organizations resulting in this important publication. We wish to acknowledge our funders and state partners at the Minnesota Department of Human Services' (DHS) Child Safety and Permanency Division for their financial and programmatic support, which informed the construction of the survey instrument. Partners at the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) provided critical feedback on instrument development and sampling, as well as facilitated the implementation of the survey itself. In particular we would like to acknowledge the individual contributions of Eric Ratzmann, MACSSA Director, as well as Brenda Mahoney of Stearns County and Jodi Wetland of Hennepin (and formerly Olmsted) County as co-chairs of the MACSSA Children's Committee. County Directors and Managers from child welfare divisions across the state distributed the survey and completed follow up contacts with staff on behalf of researchers. We believe this contributed to the higher than average response rate and that the research benefited greatly from their contributions. Finally, researchers wish to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of the Minnesota Child Welfare Workforce. Those who chose to participate in this survey contributed their time and intellect to informing critical questions facing the State during a time of intense system reform with mounting workloads, increased scrutiny, and with staffing shifts and turnover not previously experienced.

Authors of this publication also wish to thank doctoral students at the School of Social Work for their many contributions to this project. Specifically, we acknowledge the work of Karen Goodenough for her work on the study design, data collection, and preliminary descriptive analysis. We also acknowledge the work of Dr. Mihwa Lee on the descriptive analysis and David Glesener and Renada Goldberg for their assistance in the development of this report.

Introduction

In an effort to better understand the characteristics, perceptions, and experiences of child welfare practitioners during a time of system reform, researchers from the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare partnered with the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) and representatives of the Child Safety and Permanency Division of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to carry out the 2016 Minnesota Child Welfare Workforce Stabilization Study. The *Region 9 Quantitative Findings* report provides descriptions of the characteristics, perceptions, and experiences of professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, and adoption and permanency in Region 9. It is important to note that one of the main goals of the study was to understand factors that may contribute to workforce instability; thus this report highlights these factors and in doing so does not necessarily acknowledge the strengths of the system and its workforce. Statewide findings are presented for context throughout the report.

Personal Characteristics

Table 1 shows the personal characteristics of the survey respondents. The majority of Region 9 professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, and adoption and permanency that responded to the 2016 Minnesota Child Welfare Workforce Stabilization Survey were working in front-line positions (85%). Region 9 professionals overwhelmingly identified as White (100%). Similarly, professionals largely identified as female (94%). In Region 9, 32% of the workforce reported being 30 years or younger, and 6% reported being 56 years or older. It is important to note that while one out of every eight professionals in the more rural regions of Minnesota was aged 25 or younger, this was not true for Region 9 where 12% of the workforce was in this age range. Similarly, one out of every five professionals (and in some regions, one out of every four professionals) was aged 60 or older in Minnesota's north central and northeast regions, suggesting that the workforce may be on the verge of experiencing significant turnover due to retirement; however, 0% of Region 9 professionals was age 60 or older.

Educational Background

Table 1 shows a large proportion of Region 9's workforce reported having earned graduate degrees (38%). More than one third of all professionals in the workforce were trained specifically in social work (36%), with 21% reporting their highest social work degree as BSW and 15% reporting having earned an MSW. Regions with institutions of higher education, and particularly those that offered degrees in social work tended to have the highest proportions of professionals with advanced educational training. In Region 9, 9% of professionals reported receiving specialized education and training in child welfare through Title IV-E programs.

Tenure in Child Protection, Involuntary Foster Care, and Adoption/Permanency

Almost half (50%) of Region 9's workforce has been in the CP/IFC/A/P field for nine or more years (with 35% reporting tenure of 15 or more years); however, 32% of the workforce has been in the field for two years or less as shown in Table 1.

Time in Current Position

While the levels of tenure reported by Region 9 professionals indicate an experienced workforce, recent turnover and hiring within the field is also evident. As shown in Table 1, one out of every eight professionals (21%) in Region 9's child protection system has been in his/her current position less than one year and nearly half of all professionals in the region (44%) has been in his/her current position for two years or less. These trends reveal that many professionals were fairly new to their positions and/or agencies. On the other hand, 35% of respondents in Region 9 have been in their current position for 13 or more years.

Table 1. Region 9 and Statewide Personal Characteristics.

	Region 9 <i>(Sample size, n=34)</i>	Statewide <i>(Sample size, n=734)</i>
	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
Race/Ethnicity		
White	34 (100.0%)	663 (90.3%)
Professional of Color	0 (0.0%)	71 (9.7%)
Work Position		
Supervisor	5 (14.7%)	110 (15%)
Front Line Staff	29 (85.3%)	624 (85%)
Gender		
Male	2 (5.9%)	94 (12.8%)
Female	32 (94.1%)	638 (86.9%)
Age		
20-25 yrs	4 (11.8%)	49 (6.7%)
26-30 yrs	7 (20.6%)	120 (16.3%)
31-35 yrs	2 (5.9%)	117 (15.9%)
36-40 yrs	3 (8.8%)	105 (14.3%)
41-45 yrs	10 (29.4%)	104 (14.2%)
46-50 yrs	4 (11.8%)	83 (11.3%)

51-55 yrs	2 (5.9%)	68 (9.3%)
56-60 yrs	2 (5.9%)	52 (7.1%)
Over 60 yrs	0 (0.0%)	36 (4.9%)
Graduate Degree (n=34, n=715)	13 (38.2%)	265 (37.1%)
Highest Social Work Degree		
No SW Degree	22 (64.7%)	323 (44.0%)
BSW	7 (20.6%)	235 (32.0%)
MSW	5 (14.7%)	176 (24.0%)
IV-E (n=34, n=714)	3 (8.8%)	111 (15.5%)
CP Tenure		
< 1 yr	5 (14.7%)	110 (15.0%)
1-2 yrs	6 (17.6%)	108 (14.7%)
3-4 yrs	4 (11.8%)	85 (11.6%)
5-6 yrs	2 (5.9%)	55 (7.5%)
7-8 yrs	0 (0.0%)	34 (4.6%)
9-10 yrs	1 (2.9%)	52 (7.1%)
11-12 yrs	1 (2.9%)	29 (4.0%)
13-15 yrs	3 (8.8%)	53 (7.2%)
> 15 yrs	12 (35.3%)	208 (28.3%)
Current Position Tenure		
< 1 yr	7 (20.6%)	170 (23.2%)
1-2 yrs	8 (23.5%)	152 (20.7%)
3-4 yrs	4 (11.8%)	99 (13.5%)
5-6 yrs	1 (2.9%)	49 (6.7%)

7-8 yrs	0 (0.0%)	43 (5.9%)
9-10 yrs	1 (2.9%)	45 (6.1%)
11-12 yrs	1 (2.9%)	20 (2.7%)
13-15 yrs	3 (8.8%)	40 (5.4%)
> 15 yrs	9 (26.5%)	116 (15.8%)

Job Satisfaction

More than half of Region 9 professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, and permanency in Minnesota reported satisfaction with their current jobs (74%) as shown in Table 2.

Input into decision-making and professionals' beliefs that they have a positive impact on clients' lives are aspects that may contribute to job satisfaction (or the lack thereof). Table 2 shows that one out of every three Region 9 professionals reported (38%) that they did not have sufficient input into decision-making in the agencies in which they worked. However, Region 9 professionals overwhelmingly (100%) reported that they had a positive impact on the lives of their clients; this belief was largely consistent across every region in Minnesota.

Concern for personal and family safety as well as feeling overwhelmed by job duties may also contribute to job dissatisfaction. Concerns for personal and family safety were evident from Region 9 professionals' responses. Across Region 9, Table 2 shows that half of all professionals (50%) reported being afraid for their personal safety and almost a third of professionals (29%) reported being afraid for the safety of their own family at least some of the time. Safety concerns were highest - for both personal and one's own family safety - in the northern and western regions of Minnesota. In addition, a vast majority of all Region 9 professionals reported feeling overwhelmed by their job duties (71%).

Table 2. Region 9 and Statewide Job Satisfaction.

	Region 9 (Sample size, n=34)	Statewide (Sample size, n=734)
	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
I am satisfied with my job as it currently is	25 (73.5%)	492 (66.7%)
I believe I have sufficient input into decision making in the agency in which I work	21 (61.8%)	466 (63.5%)

I am sometimes afraid for my personal safety due to the nature of my work	17 (50.0%)	426 (58.0%)
I am sometimes afraid for the safety of my family members due to the nature of my work	10 (29.4%)	261 (35.6%)
I believe that I can have positive impact on the lives of my clients (For supervisors, please indicate if you believe that you can have a positive impact on the lives of the clients your staff serve)	34 (100.0%)	705 (96.0%)
I feel overwhelmed in my job duties	24 (70.6%)	499 (68.0%)

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) is also often referred to as *compassion fatigue*, *vicarious trauma*, or *burnout*. STS is defined as indirect exposure to traumatic material that results in symptoms such as hyper-vigilance, hopelessness, avoidance, minimizing, anger and cynicism, insensitivity to violence, sleeplessness, illness, inability to embrace complexity, and diminished self-care. STS is of particular concern for professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, and permanency. In Region 9, the vast majority of professionals (84%) reported experiencing STS while carrying out their job duties, with one out of every three Region 9 professionals reporting that these experiences had a negative effect on their ability to carry out their job, shown in Table 3. Of great concern for Region 9 is the reported lack of support available to assist professionals in managing their STS. Almost half of Region 9 professionals (47%) indicated they did not have the support they needed to manage their STS.

Table 3. Region 9 and Statewide Secondary Traumatic Stress.

	Region 9	Statewide
	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
I have experienced secondary traumatic stress while carrying out my job duties (n=32; n=716)	27 (84.4%)	595 (83.1%)
Secondary traumatic stress has negatively affected my ability to carry out my job duties (n=31; n=684)	11 (35.5%)	254 (37.1%)
I have had the supports I needed to manage my secondary traumatic stress (n=30; n=684)	16 (53.3%)	430 (62.9%)

Supervision

Supervision is a consistent predictor of workforce satisfaction and stability. It is encouraging that a majority of Region 9 professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, and permanency (77%) reported satisfaction with the supervision they received. As shown in Table 4, professionals in Region 9 overwhelmingly reported that their supervisors trusted their decision-making and abilities (97%) and that their supervisors were willing to help when problems arose (88%). In addition, two-thirds of Region 9 professionals reported that they and their supervisors shared work experiences with one another to improve effectiveness of client services. However, more than half of all Region 9 professionals reported their supervision centered around administrative aspects, such as monitoring and compliance.

Table 4. Region 9 and Statewide Supervision.

	Region 9 (Sample size, n=34)	Statewide (Sample size, n=734)
	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
I receive adequate supervision, guidance, and support from my immediate supervisor	26 (76.5%)	571 (77.8%)
The supervision I receive centers around administrative monitoring (compliance) as opposed to support or education	19 (55.9%)	350 (47.7%)
My supervisor trusts my decision-making and my ability to do my job	33 (97.1%)	690 (94.0%)
I find that my supervisor is willing to help when problems arise	30 (88.2%)	657 (89.5%)
My supervisor and I share work experiences with one another to improve effectiveness of client service	21 (61.8%)	570 (77.7%)

Agency Processes, Policy, and Support

Professionals also responded to a number of questions about their perceptions of agency processes, policy, and attitudes of others. Table 5 shows that overwhelmingly, Region 9 professionals (100%) noted that their peers were willing to support and assist each other when

problems arose. More than half of Region 9 professionals (59%) reported that their agencies provided sufficient professional development opportunities and activities. On the topic of policy, 50% of professionals agreed that child welfare staff cooperatively participated with supervisors and administrators in developing new programs and policies in their agencies. In Region 9, only 27% of professionals noted that frequent changes in policy have had a negative impact on their job performance, however, almost half of all professionals stated that they would be able to better carry out their job duties if explanations of policies were made clearer (41%). Unsurprisingly, the majority of professionals (65%) did not believe that the public held their work in high esteem.

Table 5. Region 9 and Statewide Agency Processes, Policy, and Support.

	Region 9 (Sample size, n=34)	Statewide (Sample size, n=734)
	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
Frequent changes in policies have had a negative impact on my job performance	9 (26.5%)	430 (58.6%)
Professional development opportunities and activities provided by my agency are adequate/sufficient to enhance my ability to do my job	20 (58.8%)	453 (61.7%)
The general public holds employees of child welfare in high professional esteem	12 (35.3%)	159 (21.7%)
If explanations of policy decisions were made clearer to me, I would be better able to carry out my job duties and responsibilities	14 (41.2%)	388 (52.9%)
In this agency, child welfare staff cooperatively participate with supervisors and administrators in developing new programs and policies	17 (50.0%)	365 (49.7%)
My peers are willing to support and assist one another when problems arise	34 (100.0%)	700 (95.4%)

Workforce Stability

Intentions to remain employed in child protection and particularly in professionals' current agencies were a large focus of the Minnesota Child Welfare Stabilization Survey. In this survey,

we asked professionals to identify the job seeking activities in which they participated in the past year as well as their intentions to remain in the field and in their current agencies in the future.

In Table 6, the results of the survey revealed that in the past 12 months half of all Region 9 professionals (53%) had looked or applied for a position other than the one in which they currently worked. However, 15% of all Region 9 professionals actively sought positions solely outside of child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, or permanency - referred to as *leavers* in the table below. In Region 9, 38% of professionals sought positions within the field or were inclusive of positions both inside and outside of the field in their job search - referred to as *movers* in the table below.

Table 6. Region 9 and Statewide Workforce Stability, Last Year.

	Region 9 (Sample size, n=34)	Statewide (Sample size, n=720)
LAST Year	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
Stayers	16 (47.1%)	338 (46.9%)
Movers	13 (38.2%)	233 (32.4%)
Leavers	5 (14.7%)	149 (20.7%)

In Table 7, the results of the survey revealed that the majority of Region 9 professionals (88%) intended to remain in their current positions in the upcoming 12 months. Within Region 9, only one professional intended to move to a position within child protection, involuntary foster care, adoption, or permanency in a different agency than the one in which they were currently employed; three professionals (8%) in Region 9 intended to leave the field altogether.

Table 7. Region 9 and Statewide Workforce Stability, Next Year.

	Region 9 (Sample size, n=34)	Statewide (Sample size, n=700)
NEXT Year	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
Stayers	30 (88.2%)	581 (83.0%)
Movers	1 (2.9%)	47 (6.7%)
Leavers	3 (8.8%)	72 (10.3%)

Table 8 shows the top three factors Region 9 professionals identified as important for retention are increased salary (94%), lower caseload (79%), and fewer administrative requirements (79%).

Table 8. Region 9 and Statewide Factors Important for Retention.

	Region 9 (Sample size, n=34)	Statewide (Sample size, n=720)
	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
Different work hours	10 (29.4%)	265 (36.8%)
Increased salary	32 (94.1%)	636 (88.3%)
Lower caseload	27 (79.4%)	586 (81.4%)
Fewer administrative requirements	27 (79.4%)	582 (80.8%)
Increased frequency or length of supervision	9 (26.5%)	231 (32.1%)
Higher quality supervision	16 (47.1%)	300 (41.7%)
Better communication about policy and practice changes	19 (55.9%)	443 (61.5%)
Additional opportunities for involvement in policy and practice changes	22 (64.7%)	446 (61.9%)
Additional supports to help deal with secondary traumatic stress	25 (73.5%)	470 (65.3%)
Additional professional development opportunities	25 (73.5%)	514 (71.4%)

Child Protection Reform

Region 9 professionals working in child protection, involuntary foster care, permanency, and adoption generally reported being aware of the child protection reforms taking place in Minnesota. In fact, 79% of professionals reported being generally aware of the reforms taking place in Minnesota and 68% of professionals were aware of *specific elements* of the reform and its resulting impact on their practice, shown in Table 9.

Generally, more Region 9 professionals reported being satisfied with communication provided by their agency than they were with communication provided by DHS. While 74% of Region 9

professionals reported satisfaction with communication by their agency regarding reform, only 44% were satisfied with communication by DHS regarding the proposed changes.

Region 9 professionals also reported that their agencies advocated on behalf of the workforce (65%) and on behalf of the children and families served during the current child protection reform process (71%).

Regardless of their awareness of the reform, their satisfaction about its communication, or their perceptions of advocacy efforts within their agencies, Region 9 professionals overwhelmingly (91%) indicated that there is a need to increase public awareness of their work.

Table 9. Region 9 and Statewide Child Protection Reform.

	Region 9	Statewide
	Number (Percentage)	Number (Percentage)
I am generally aware of the child protection reforms taking place (n=57; n=717)	27 (79.4%)	605 (84.4%)
I am aware of specific elements of proposed child protection reforms in Minnesota AND how those will impact my practice (n=57; n=718)	23 (67.6%)	528 (73.5%)
I am satisfied with the communication from the leadership at DHS about the proposed changes in child protection (n=57; n=716)	15 (44.1%)	247 (34.5%)
I am satisfied with the communication from the leadership in my agency about the proposed changes in child protection (n=34; n=718)	25 (73.5%)	473 (65.9%)
I feel as though my agency has advocated for the child welfare workforce in the current child protection reform process (n=34; n=715)	22 (64.7%)	466 (65.2%)

I feel my agency has advocated for the children and families served in the current child protection reform process (n=34; n=716)	24 (70.6%)	496 (69.3%)
There is a need to increase public awareness of the nature and value of my work (n=34; n=718)	31 (91.2%)	678 (94.4%)