



REPORT FROM THE 2004
CHILD WELFARE
WORKFORCE SURVEY

STATE AGENCY FINDINGS

FEBRUARY 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

Survey Process and Response Rate

This was a collaborative survey conducted in the summer of 2004 by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), Fostering Results, and the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research, with funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The focus of the survey was public child welfare agencies and the questionnaire was sent to the child welfare administrator in each state and the District of Columbia. While survey data were also collected from a number of localities selected by the state child welfare administrator, this report summarizes only state data.

In all states the survey was completed by administrative level staff, often involving responses by more than one administrator, e.g., human resources and training managers. The data in this report were *not* obtained from front-line workers or supervisors.

A total of 42 states (82%) completed the survey, including 31 states that use a state-administered child welfare system and 11 states that are locally administered. All but three of the states responding to this survey had also responded to the initial child welfare workforce survey done in 2000.

Missing Data

All surveys have missing data, and in this survey missing data may signify: 1) the specific question is not applicable to the state and data do not exist; 2) the question cannot be answered by the state because data are collected only at the local level; or 3) the question applies and is within the scope of the state agency, but respondents either do not collect the data, do not have the data available, or choose not to share the data.

Description of State Survey Respondents

- All but three of the 42 state child welfare agencies are part of a larger human service agency.
- The average operating budget from all sources was \$327 million, with a range from \$2 million to \$1.9 billion. The median budget was \$154 million.
- Regarding agency accreditation: one state was accredited; one state was provisionally accredited; seven states were seeking accreditation; and six states were considering accreditation.
- The overall focus of the survey was on case-carrying child welfare workers (Appendix A).

Conditions in State Child Welfare Systems

- Sixteen of the 34 states responding (47%) were involved in a child welfare court decree or settlement.
- Only six of the 35 states responding (17%) reported that they had state statutory caseload standards.
- Twenty-one of the 34 states responding (62%) had case-carrying child welfare workers who belonged to a union, and 18 of 21 states (82%) engaged in collective bargaining with the unions.
- Only nine of the 35 states reporting (26%) were contracting with the private sector for child welfare services.

Information Agencies Gather Directly from Their Employees

States use several methods for collecting recommendations and perceptions directly from their case-carrying staff with varying frequency:

Method	Never or Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently
Exit interviews	9%	28%	63%
Staff focus groups	42	58	0
Staff surveys	30	61	9

States that responded “never or rarely” reported that budget limitations, lack of staff and time, and procedural difficulties were the main reasons they did not use these methods more.

Workforce Salary Data

On April 1, 2004, the average salary for incumbents in each category of worker was:

Worker Category	Average Salary
child protective service workers	\$35,553
in-home protective service workers	34,929
foster care and adoption workers	35,911
multiple program workers	36,136
front-line supervisors	44,232

These average salaries are markedly lower than salaries for nurses, public school teachers, police officers, and firefighters.

In the three and a half years since the 2000 workforce survey, average incumbent Child Protective Service (CPS) worker salaries had risen by 6.3 percent and supervisor salaries had risen by 5.5 percent. During this time the federal cost of living index had risen by 9.7 percent. Average minimum salaries, i.e., entry salaries, for each category of worker had risen by 8.5 percent to 9.6 percent during this time.

Data on average minimum and maximum salaries for each category of worker also are provided, including increases since the 2000 survey.

Education, Licensing, Training, and Career Ladders

A Bachelors degree was the predominant minimum academic degree required, but states require social work licensing at varying rates for each category of worker: 29 percent for CPS workers; 53 percent for in-home protective service workers; 42 percent for foster care and adoption workers; and 33 percent for multiple programs.

Information is provided on the average number of hours of mandatory pre-service training and average number of hours of in-service training each year for each category of worker, as well as the number of states that have career ladders for each category.

Caseloads

Data are provided about the average, median, and range of caseload sizes both when the child is defined as the case and when the family is defined as the case for each category of worker. The average supervisor to full-time equivalent worker ratio was 1:6 for all categories of worker.

Staffing Issues

Detailed data provided includes:

- authorized full-time equivalent positions on April 1, 2004,
- number of vacant positions on April 1, 2004,
- number of employees leaving the agency for any reason during 2003,
- number of staff leaving agency during 2003 that are estimated to be preventable.¹

The average number of weeks required to fill vacant positions varied from a low of seven weeks for in-home protective service workers and multiple program workers, to 10 weeks for CPS workers, to a high of 13 weeks for foster care and adoption workers. All of these averages are higher than the comparable data of six to seven weeks for all types of workers from the 2000 survey.

The average tenure for workers leaving due to preventable turnover was five years for CPS and in-home protective service workers, three years for foster care and adoption and multiple program workers, and nine years for supervisors.

Child Welfare Vacancy and Turnover Rates

Using the data provided by the state child welfare agencies described immediately above, the following rates were calculated:

Category of Worker	Average Vacancy Rate (4/1/04)	Average Turnover Rate (2003)	Average Prevent-able Turnover Rate (2003)
Child protective service worker	8.5%	22.1%	12.6%
In-home protective service workers	9.9	15.1	6.5
Foster care and adoption workers	9.5	17.7	7.4
Multiple program workers	9.8	19.9	11.1
Front line supervisors	6.8	11.8	4.6

Data are provided comparing the vacancy and turnover rates from the 2004 survey with comparable data from the 2000 survey. While some rates have increased and others have decreased, overall there is no change.

The average percentage of turnover that was preventable ranged from a low of 49 percent for supervisors to a high of 69 percent for in-home protective service workers.

¹ Preventable due to reasons other than retirement, death, marriage/parenting, returning to school, or spousal job move.

Recruitment and Retention Changes

Comparing 2003 with the prior two years, 58 percent of survey respondents reported that their recruitment and hiring experience was about the same, while 23 percent reported it was some or much better, and 19 percent said it was some or much worse. For preventable turnovers, 71 percent rated their experience about the same, 13 percent some or much better, and 16 percent some or much worse.

State child welfare administrators rated the degree to which a number of factors contributed to the changes in recruitment and preventable turnover. The most important factor was budget limitations and constraints—rated by over 50 percent of respondents as highly important. The second highest factor was response to a tragedy e.g., child death or missing child.

Recruitment Problems and Strategies

State administrators rated the severity of 11 problems they might have experienced in the recruitment and hiring of case-carrying child welfare staff during the past 12 months.

The six most severe problems are listed below in descending order:

- Perceived imbalance of demands of job and financial compensation,
- Starting salaries are not competitive with comparable positions,
- Other attractive labor market alternatives for job seekers,
- Budget constraints other than hiring freezes or restrictions,
- Hiring freezes or restrictions,
- Negative media reports.

Survey respondents also indicated whether they had implemented over the past five years 12 strategies in order to recruit and hire case-carrying child welfare workers, and if they had, how effective those strategies had been. Five strategies were implemented by more than half of the states, and they are listed below in descending order of their rated effectiveness:

- University-agency training partnerships and/or stipends for students,
- Job announcements posted on web sites,
- Early and aggressive recruiting at social work schools,
- Emphasized continuing education/training and supervision opportunities within agency,
- Increased personal contact with potential candidates to encourage their application.

Preventable Turnover Problems and Strategies

As with recruitment, state administrators rated the severity of 17 problems they might have experienced regarding preventable turnover of case-carrying child welfare staff during the past 12 months. The nine most severe problems are listed below in descending order:

- Workloads too high and/or demanding, e.g., stress, being overwhelmed,
- Caseloads are too high,
- After hours and unpredictable work interfere with personal and family life,
- Too much time spent on travel, transport, paperwork, etc.,
- Insufficient service resources for families and children,
- Workers do not feel valued by agency,
- Problems with the quality of supervision,
- Insufficient opportunities for promotion and career advancement,
- Low salaries.

Survey respondents also indicated whether they had implemented, over the past five years, 12 strategies in order to retain case-carrying child welfare workers, and if they had, how effective those strategies had been. Fourteen strategies were implemented by more than half of the states, and they are listed below in descending order of their rated effectiveness:

- Increased/improved in-service training,
- Increased educational opportunities, e.g., MSW,
- Increased/improved orientation/pre-service training,
- Provided technology, e.g., cell phones, laptops,
- Improved professional culture throughout agency,
- Enhanced supervisor skills,
- Implemented new child/family intervention strategies,
- Increased workers feeling valued/respected by agency,
- Increased worker safety,
- Implemented flex time/changes to office hours,
- Regularly sought and used employees' views,
- Improved physical office/building space,
- Special efforts to raise workers' salaries,
- Increased workers' access to service resources.

State administrators rated how important eight factors were in contributing to the child welfare agency's not implementing recruitment and retention strategies over the past five years. The question looked at the strategies as a whole rather than as specific reasons that specific strategies were not implemented. For both recruitment and retention, the most important factors are listed below in descending order of importance:

- We couldn't implement any strategies that required new resources,
- Agency staff did not have the authority to implement strategies,

- Strategies need to be customized to the unique needs of local offices,
- Crises in child welfare prevented agency staff from focusing on improvements,
- Strategies we did implement sufficiently improved recruitment and retention,
- We had no consensus on which specific strategies would improve outcomes,
- CFSR and PIP process prevented agency staff from focusing on improvements,
- We had no confidence that these strategies would improve our recruitment/retention outcomes.

Organizational and Personal Factors Contributing to Staff Retention

Focusing on the positive side of staff retention, state administrators rated the importance of 15 organizational and personal factors that contribute to the decision of case-carrying child welfare workers to remain employed with that state’s public child welfare agency. The nine most important factors are listed below in descending order of importance:

- Good supervision, with a supervisor who cares about the worker as a person,
- An agency mission/purpose that makes workers feel their jobs are important,
- Dependable management support of and commitment to workers,
- Worker’s self-efficacy,
- Worker’s human caring,
- Fair compensation and benefits,
- Reasonable number of cases,
- Manageable workloads,
- Opportunities for workers to learn and grow professionally.

Most Important Agency Actions and Initiatives

In response to an open-ended question, state administrators identified the three most important actions for initiatives child welfare agencies and their partners must take to successfully retain qualified case-carrying public child welfare workers and front-line supervisors. The top five are listed below in descending order:

- Reduced caseloads, workloads, and supervisory ratios,
- Increased salaries that are competitive and commensurate with the work,
- Improved supervision, support, technical assistance, and supervisory accountability,
- Career ladders and promotional opportunities, and personal and professional growth,
- Staff training—pre-service and in-service, and supervisory training.