National Child Welfare Workforce Institute
LEARNING, LEADING, CHANGING

How Case Severity and Workplace Resources Impact Worker Retention

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This study used survey and administrative data from 485 Oregon Department of Human Services caseworkers to investigate how family or child case severity and job resources impact workers' decisions to stay in the field.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Using the Job Demands-Resources Model, which proposes that every occupation has risk factors associated with job demands and resources, this study identified characteristics and job conditions of workers who plan to stay in the field. The authors compared job demands and resources of three groups of workers:

Satisfied Stayers	Ambivalent Stayers	Undecided Workers
Workers who are satisfied and plan to stay	Workers who are unsure about job satisfaction but plan to stay	Workers who are unsure about both job satisfaction and staying

Among the three retention groups, satisfied stayers were significantly more likely to have family or child cases with lower degrees of founded abuse and neglect (lower case severity).

Other key characteristics of **satisfied stayers:**

They had the three critical job resources identified in the study: supportive supervision; coworker support; and necessary work tools to perform their jobs, like database systems.

They were more likely to be permanency workers than child protective services workers.

They were more likely to have a social work education or education in a related field.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Child welfare programs can develop their own workforce of satisfied stayers by strengthening job resources and reducing job demands. This includes:

• Reducing caseloads, particularly for workers with severe cases

• Training and supporting supervisors to provide strengths-based supervision with clear expectations, feedback, and positive recognition

• Advancing a workplace culture with behavioral norms and expectations that prioritize worker well-being, equity, and inclusion

• Fostering supportive workplace relationships and teaching trauma-informed self-care and coping strategies