



## Respect & Worker Retention

 Augsberger, A., Schudrich, W., McGowan, B. G., & Auerbach, C. (2011). Respect in the workplace: A mixed methods study of retention and turnover in the voluntary child welfare sector. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 1222-1229.

### WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This journal article examines how perceptions of respect impact child welfare workers' attitudes toward their jobs. The sample included workers from 202 agencies in a large northeastern city who contracted with the city to provide prevention and family preservation services. The mixed methods design included both qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (survey) approaches.

### WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Respect has been widely studied in human resource literature, as perceptions of respect by workers are related to job satisfaction and intent to stay. Qualitative analysis found that perceptions of respect influence a worker's decision to stay in a demanding child welfare job:

### PERCEPTIONS OF RESPECT

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT</b>     | Respondents felt a lack of respect & support from various levels of the organization (administration, supervisors, co-workers); isolated in their work  |
| <b>FAIR SALARY &amp; BENEFITS</b> | Respondents felt current salaries too low, benefits were not adequate, and child welfare work not valued by the public  |
| <b>FAIR PROMOTION POTENTIAL</b>   | Respondents described a lack of career advancement opportunities in their agencies  |
| <b>ADEQUATE COMMUNICATION</b>     | Respondents reported internal & external communication issues (e.g., not given adequate information to assist clients; confused about agency policies; lack of understanding about prevention services by public child welfare) |
| <b>CONTINGENT REWARDS</b>         | Respondents noted lack of acknowledgment for hard work, such as recognition and "kudos" to help them feel more valued   |

The study also used quantitative analysis to develop a profile of a child welfare worker more likely to leave their job. Perceptions of respect, age, and a social work degree were all statistically significant predictors of intent to leave: Workers who perceived greater respect at their jobs were less likely to think about leaving, as were older workers, while workers with a social work degree (Bachelor's or Master's) were 60% more likely to intend to leave.

### WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Cultivating a workplace culture of respect can increase job satisfaction, help overworked child welfare staff feel valued in their careers, and improve retention rates. Organizations should try to employ strategies that recognize individual staff achievements and conduct ongoing trainings for supervisors focused on creating a workplace environment of respect. In lieu of salary increases, which may not be possible, organizations should consider increasing professional development opportunities.