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Why do they leave? Modeling child welfare workers' turnover intentions

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Abstract

The high rates of turnover in the child welfare field have grave implications for service provision to vulnerable populations. Using mixed methods with SEM and constant comparative content analyses, the study tested a theoretical model of intention to leave among child welfare workers. The theoretical model was found to fit the data well, indicating that diversity, together with a stressful, unjust, exclusionary and non-supportive organizational climate, negatively influence individual well-being, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, resulting in intention to leave the job. Study findings hold implications for supervisory recruitment and training, structural and procedural systems reform, and future research.

Keywords: Child welfare; Workforce; Turnover; Intention to leave

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1. Introduction

Child welfare agencies are currently facing a serious and widespread problem with employee retention (Ferguson, 2002; United States General Accounting Office [GAO], 2003). Research in recent years indicates that annual turnover rates commonly exceed 30% and can range as high as 85% among our nation's child welfare agencies (Ellett & Millar, 2001; Jordan Institute for Families, 1999; Thoma, 1998). These high turnover rates pose a major challenge to child welfare agencies and to the social work field in general (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Jayaratne & Chess, 1983, 1984; Koeske & Kirk, 1995). While some turnover is healthy for any organization in that it brings in fresh ideas and expertise, the high rates of turnover in the child welfare field have grave implications for the quality, consistency, and stability of services provided to the vulnerable populations who use child welfare services (Powell & York, 1992; Todd & Deery-Schmitt, 1996). A recent meta-analysis of the research on turnover between 1980 and 2000 reveals that not much is known about antecedents to turnover among human services professionals and even less about workers in the child welfare field (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). To effectively retain workers, employers must know what factors motivate their employees to stay and what factors cause them to leave.

This article examines antecedents to intention to leave among workers in a large urban child welfare agency. It is important to note here that intention to leave was selected as the outcome variable because it is the most consistent single predictor of actual turnover (George & Jones, 1996; Mor Barak et al., 2001) and because it is more accessible for empirical inquiry in cross-sectional studies. Additionally, intention to leave has its own negative impact on service quality since workers who are contemplating turnover are less likely to invest the efforts needed to provide good quality services (Balfour & Neff, 1993).

The study employed mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative, to better identify correlates of intention to leave among child welfare workers (Padgett, 2003). Using structural equations modeling (SEM), we tested a theoretical model depicting the relationship between diversity characteristics, organizational climate and personal outcome variables on intention to leave (Mor Barak, 2000). Originally developed for human service organizations, to date, the model has only been validated in for-profit high-tech organizations (see, for example, Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998; Mor Barak & Levin, 2002). The current study reports an empirical test of the model among child welfare workers for the first time.

2. Literature review

2.1. Determinants of intention to leave and turnover

In this review, we provide the theoretical basis and the empirical support for the conceptual model that was tested in this study. We examine antecedents to intention to leave and report previous research findings with respect to three major components that comprise our theoretical model. The three components are *diversity characteristics*—including visible diversity (such as gender, ethnicity, and age) and invisible diversity (such as

education, tenure, and position); *organizational climate*—fairness in procedures and compensation, organizational inclusion–exclusion, stress, and social support; and *individual affective outcomes*—well-being, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. We tested a model that outlined the connection between these components and intention to leave as well as the interconnections among them (for a graphical depiction of the model, see Fig. 1).

2.2. Theoretical perspectives on diversity, organizational climate, personal affective outcomes and turnover

In this discussion, we draw on social psychological theories, primarily social identity and social comparison theories, to provide the basis for the conceptual model that was tested in this study. Social identity theory delineates the connection between individual identity and social structures through the meanings people attach to their membership in identity groups such as racial, ethnic or gender groups (Tajfel, 1982). These meanings, in turn, shape individuals' interactions with others either from their own identity group or from other groups, thereby affecting the way they experience the organizational environment as stressful or not stressful, fair or unfair, and inclusive or exclusionary (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1987). Organizational inclusion refers to the individual's sense of being a part of the organizational system in both the formal processes, such as access to information and decision-making channels, and the informal processes, such as "water cooler" and lunch meetings where information exchange and decisions making often take place (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). The social comparison process, as delineated by Leon Festinger, postulates that individuals have a need to evaluate themselves and use their group as a referent to assess their social standing (Festinger, 1957; Mullen & Goethals, 1987). Perceptions of inclusion or exclusion, therefore, are a form of an on-going personal evaluation, used as the chief methodology to assess one's own position within groups and organizations.

A theoretical connection between inclusion and individual affective outcomes in social systems can be extrapolated from Leary and Downs' (1995) socio-meter model of self-esteem. The authors posit that other people's reactions, particularly the degree to which they accept and include versus reject and exclude individuals, are vital to the individual's physical and psychological well-being. Thus, with self-esteem functioning as a

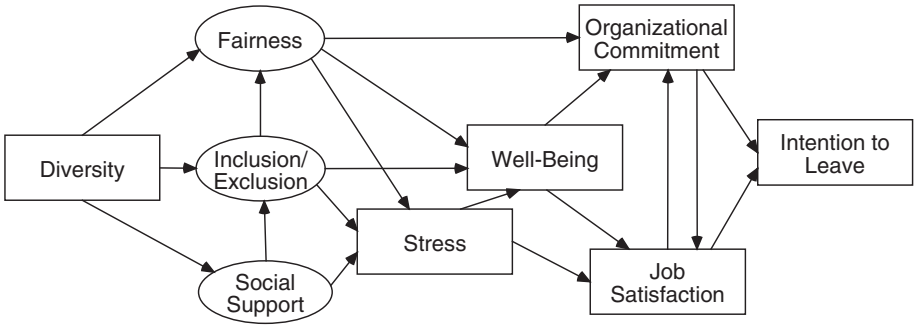

Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

psychological gauge, or socio-meter, people can monitor inclusion or exclusion reactions towards them from their environment (Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995). Triggered by an environment that is exclusionary, the individual's lowered self-esteem affects behavioral outcomes that are aimed at rectifying the situation by, for example, strong efforts to assimilate or by disengaging from the exclusionary system and linking with a more inclusive environment. Therefore, when employees feel excluded, their reaction to the organization can take the form of lowered job satisfaction and reduced organizational commitment. Such reactions may lead to a desire to disengage from the exclusionary and stressful environment, leading to intention to leave the job and eventually actual turnover.

2.3. Research findings

In this review, we examine antecedents to intention to leave and report previous research findings with respect to three major components (indicated earlier) that comprise our theoretical model: (a) *diversity characteristics*, (b) *organizational climate*, and (c) *individual affective outcomes*. Our review includes research that examines the connection between these variables and intention to leave as well as some relevant interconnections between the variables that add richness and depth to the model. We draw on research that examined these relationships in human services organizations but since the research in this field is very limited, we also draw on research from other relevant disciplines such as psychology, management, and business administration.

2.4. Diversity and intention to leave

A common distinction in the diversity literature divides diversity into two categories: visible diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, and age) and invisible diversity (e.g., education, tenure and position) (Cummings, Zhou, & Oldham, 1993; Jackson & Ruderman, 1995). The findings related to gender and turnover generally indicate that women are more likely to leave than men (Knapp, Harissis, & Missiakoulis, 1982; Schwartz, 1989; Powell & York, 1992). The research results related to race/ethnicity and turnover are mixed: while most studies indicate that members of minority groups report more negative experiences than do their counterparts (Ibarra, 1995; Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997) and are more likely to leave their jobs than are their colleagues (Koeske & Kirk, 1995; Milliken & Martins, 1996), others have found that turnover is less likely among ethnic minorities (Tai, Bame, & Robinson, 1998). Age is also a relevant variable in predicting turnover: older workers are less likely to leave their jobs than are their younger coworkers (Ito, Eisen, Sederer, Yamada, & Tachimori, 2001; Kiyak, Namazi, & Kahana, 1997; Manlove & Guzell, 1997), often because of perceived and actual lack of alternatives and vested benefits (McNeely, 1992; Clark, Georgellis, & Sanfey, 1997; Spector, 1997).

With respect to education and intention to leave, findings suggest that better educated workers – those who often have more employment options available to them – may more frequently contemplate leaving their jobs (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Blankertz & Robinson, 1997; Todd & Deery-Schmitt, 1996). Organizational tenure is also negatively related to employees' intention to leave the organization. The more time that an employee has invested in an organization, the more committed he or she is to continuing employment

with the organization (Krecker, 1994; Lane, 1998; Miller & Wheeler, 1992). Examination of agency job position in relation to intention to leave has produced mixed results, with some studies showing a significant relationship between position and intent to leave (Blankertz & Robinson, 1997; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986) and others finding no significance (Michaels & Spector, 1982; Hiller & Dyehouse, 1987).

2.5. *Organizational climate and intention to leave

Workers' perceptions of *organizational fairness* in both the procedures used to determine promotions and reward allocations (procedural justice) and the actual outcomes of salary and benefit distributions (distributive justice) have been noted to significantly influence levels of organizational commitment (Lemons & Jones, 2001; Moorman, Niehoff, & Organ, 1993; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993). In a meta-analytic review of 183 organizational justice studies, Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, and Ng (2001) found that both distributive and procedural justice were highly correlated with organizational commitment, with a composite justice measure accounting for a full 35% of the variance in commitment. Employees who lack a sense of *inclusion* are more likely to be unhappy with their jobs and to feel less committed to the organization (Harrison & Hubbard, 1998; Knoop, 1995; Lawler, 1994; Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Mor Barak, Findler, & Wind, 2003; Steel, Jennings, Mento, & Hendrix, 1992). Little research, however, has been conducted on the relationship between perceptions of organizational inclusion and intention to leave. *Stress* is consistently shown to be one of the strongest predictors of intention to leave (McKee, Markham, & Scott, 1992; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Siu & Cooper, 1998; Todd & Deery-Schmitt, 1996). Those with higher workloads demonstrate more thoughts about quitting their jobs (Powell & York, 1992; Tai et al., 1998), as do those with perceived role and work overload (Jolma, 1990) and conflicting or ambiguous roles (Itzhaky, 1995; Um & Harrison, 1998). Finally, with regard to *social support*, a growing body of research clearly demonstrates that support in the workplace, especially from supervisors, has important implications for worker retention ([Alexander, Lichtenstein, Oh, & Ullman, 1998; Blankertz & Robinson, 1997; Jinnett & Alexander, 1999; Schaefer & Moos, 1996; Smith, 2005). Previous research has indicated that the amount of supervisory support may alleviate the effects of job stress, especially during stressful events and occurrences in the employee's life (e.g., the classic studies by House, 1981 and Kasl & Wells, 1985, as well as more recent studies such as Fried & Tiegs, 1993, and Kickul & Posig, 2001). Utilizing hierarchical regression analyses, Kickul and Posig (2001) demonstrated that the relationship between role conflict and emotional exhaustion, as well as the relationship between time pressure and emotional exhaustion, were moderated by the participants' perceptions of their supervisors' emotional support. There is strong evidence of the positive relationship between social support from coworkers and supervisors, and job satisfaction (Griffin, Patterson, & West, 2001; Landsman, 2001; Parkes, Mendham, & von Rabenau, 1994; Rycraft, 1994; Sarason, Sarason, Brock, & Pierce, 1996; Schulz, Greenley, & Brown, 1995; Um & Harrison, 1998; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1996), organizational commitment (Landsman, 2001; Mannheim & Papo, 2000; Morris, Shinn, & DuMont, 1999; Weaver, 2002), and well-being (Baba, Jamal, & Tourigny, 1998).

2.6. Individual affective outcomes

Job satisfaction has been found to be a strong and consistent predictor of intention to leave as well as turnover (Agho, Mueller, & Price, 1993; Blankertz & Robinson, 1997; Hellman, 1997; Ito et al., 2001; Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid, & Sirola, 1998; Manlove & Guzell, 1997; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Research on job satisfaction clearly shows that lack of resources, less rewarding work conditions, lack of support from supervisors and coworkers, and heavy workloads all produce dissatisfied employees (Mueller & Wallace, 1996; Tyler & Cushway, 1998). *Organizational commitment*, a work attitude generally referring to the strength of an employee's identification with and involvement in the organization, is a strong predictor of intention to leave among child welfare workers (Landsman, 2001; Mor Barak et al., 2001) as well as employees in other fields (Lum et al., 1998; Tett & Meyer, 1993). *Well-being* has consistently been shown to influence both job satisfaction (Koeske & Kirk, 1995; Siu, Cooper, & Donald, 1997) and organizational commitment (Baba et al., 1998; Weaver, 2002). Finally, a review of the literature yields strong evidence for an association between job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Jayaratne, 1993; Knoop, 1995; Koeske & Kirk, 1995; Testa, 2001; Tett & Meyer, 1993), but it is not clear whether satisfaction is a precursor to commitment or whether commitment influences one's level of satisfaction. In two studies of social workers, Landsman (2001) and Mannheim and Papo (2000) found that more satisfied workers were more likely to be committed to their organization, though the opposite relationship was not tested in either study. Charles Lance (1991) tested for mutual influences and found evidence of reciprocal effects between the two measures; however, satisfaction was a stronger indicator of commitment than vice-versa.

2.7. Towards a model of diversity, organizational climate, individual affective outcomes and intention to leave

In this study, we tested an expanded version of a theoretical model depicting the relationship between diversity characteristics, organizational climate and personal outcome variables on intention to leave (Mor Barak, 2000). The model was modified based on the current review of the literature and a comprehensive meta-analysis of the turnover literature in human service organizations (Mor Barak et al., 2001). We asked how diversity characteristics and organizational climate variables – fairness, inclusion, social support and stress – affect individual sense of well-being, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction and how they ultimately affect intention to leave the organization (see Fig. 1). We propose that diversity affects the way employees are treated within the organization, thereby affecting their perceptions of fairness, inclusion and social support received. These variables affect employees' stress (e.g., unfair treatment, exclusion and lack of support will increase levels of stress), and together they affect sense of well-being, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Organizational commitment and job satisfaction have a reciprocal effect and they affect intention to leave (Lance, 1991). Some of the paths tested in the model are not shown in this schematic theoretical model for purposes of clarity of the presentation.

3. Methods

3.1. Design and procedures

The study employed a cross-sectional design with mixed method – both qualitative and quantitative – analyses, utilizing an availability sample of 418 child welfare workers drawn from a large, urban public agency. The workers were invited to participate in the study while attending one of several training sessions at a university-affiliated child welfare-training center. During the participants' lunch break, study personnel explained the study, indicating that participation is entirely voluntary and has no connection to the training or their employment at the child welfare department. A total of approximately 525 workers were invited to participate in the study, yielding a response rate that approaches 80%. Signed informed consent forms were obtained for both the written questionnaire and the follow up invitation for a personal interview. After the quantitative data were collected, subjects were called at random to participate in a more in depth interview. Those reached directly on the telephone ($n=15$) all agreed to participate. Of those for whom a message was left, approximately 70% ($n=23$) returned the call and 18 ultimately agreed to participate in the in depth interview for a total of 33 participants. Participants were asked for their consent to tape record the interviews and all subjects agreed. Participants were assured complete confidentiality in the use of both their identifying information and their qualitative comments.

3.2. Sample

The sample used in this study included 418 participants ranging in age from 23 to 67 years ($M=38.8$, SD=11.3) (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). The majority of the participants (77%) were women. There were almost equal numbers of Latino and Caucasian participants (36% and 32%, respectively), followed by African–Americans (19%), and Asian–Americans (8%). The Native American ($n=4$) and Other ($n=17$) categories were collapsed into a single group to protect participants' identities, and together they constituted 5% of the sample. Most of the participants held either a Master's degree (60%) or a Bachelor's degree (38%) and only 2% held Doctoral degrees. The majority of participants (88%) were direct service providers while 12% were managers. More than half of the participants (62%) had been in the organization for 5 years or less and only 4% had been in the organization over 20 years. Of the various types of child services workers, a majority of them ($n=97$) were family reunification workers, while 89 worked in adoptions—a special unit where workers must hold an MSW degree. Sixty were generic workers, 32 emergency response workers, and the remaining workers were concentrated in permanency placement, dependency investigation, the child abuse hotline, or family preservation. Only 15% of the sample held LCSW or LMFT licensure.

Of the 33 workers who agreed to participate in the follow up in-depth interview, 23 (70%) were women and 10 (30%) were men. There were 17 Caucasians (52%), six Latinos (18%), seven African–Americans (21%), and three Asian–Americans (9%). The age range

Table 1
Diversity characteristics of sample

	Percent of sample
Age group	
≤35	48.2
36–45	20.5
46–55	22.2
≥56	9.0
Gender	
Women	77.2
Men	22.8
Ethnicity	
Latino	35.9
Caucasian	32.0
African–American	19.0
Asian–American	8.0
Other	5.1
Education	
Bachelor's degree	37.6
Master's degree	60.0
Doctoral degree	2.4
Agency position	
Direct service provider	88.3
Manager	11.7
Agency tenure (years)	
0–5	62.3
6–10	18.1
11–15	10.9
16–20	4.8
21–25	1.0
≥26	2.9

of interviewees was 25–65, with six (18%) in the 25–30 age range, four (1 2%) in the 31–35 age range, 10 (30%) in the 36–45 age range, 10 (30%) people in the 46–55 age range, and four (12%) in the 56–65 age range. Four participants (12%) were managers, while the remaining 29 (88%) were direct service providers.

3.3. Measures

3.3.1. Demographics

The questionnaire included indicators for age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of education, agency position and duration of agency tenure.

3.3.2. Perceptions of fairness

Fairness was measured using Sweeney and McFarlin's (1993) four-item procedural justice and Price and Mueller's (1986) four-item distributive justice indices. The first measures employees perception of fairness in organizational procedures used to allocate rewards and compensation, and the second measures the perception of fairness in actual allocations of rewards and compensation. Both measures have been

widely used and validated in organizational studies (e.g., Bavendam, 1985; Boyer, 1985; Sorenson, 1985). Our data produced strong alpha indicators of internal consistency for both scales (0.95 for distributive justice and 0.90 for procedural justice).

3.3.3. Inclusion–exclusion

The fifteen-item inclusion scale measures the degree to which individuals feel a part of critical organizational processes such as work group engagement, connections to coworkers, access to information, and ability to influence the decision-making process (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). The measures have demonstrated convergent validity with Porter and Lawler's (1968) organizational satisfaction and discriminant validity with Porter's work alienation scale (Price & Mueller, 1986). For the current study, the alpha coefficient was 0.83.

3.3.4. Social support

The work-related social support index measures workers' perceptions of social support received from their supervisor, peers at work, and their significant others. Widely used in organizational research, this measure has consistently demonstrated both validity and reliability (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Pinneau's, 1975). Cronbach's alphas for this study ranged from acceptable to high with at supervisor index, 0.89; coworker index, 0.78; and spouse/significant other index, 0.92.

3.3.5. Organizational stress

Organizational stress was measured using an adapted version of a 24-item scale by Carole Beatty (1996) to examine three types of work-related stressors: challenges, interactions with colleagues, and working conditions. The scale compares favorably to Caplan et al.'s (1975) role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, future ambiguity and pay fairness scales. Cronbach's alpha reliability for this study was 0.88.

3.3.6. Well-being

General well-being was measured using the modified version of D.P. Goldberg's (1978) General Health Questionnaire (GHQ). This is a well-known and extensively validated screening questionnaire for functional psychiatric illness (Goldberg, 1978; Goodchild & Duncan-Jones, 1985). In its long version, the GHQ has been used as a psychiatric screening instrument. For the present study, a six-item version was used focusing on depression and strain rather than assessing more severe psychiatric problems. This scale produced an acceptable Cronbach alpha of 0.76 for this study.

3.3.7. Organizational commitment

Allen and Meyer's (1990) Affective Commitment Scale measures employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization. Widely used and validated, the scale has strong convergent validity with Mowday, Steers, and Porter's (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Cronbach's alpha for this sample was 0.81.

3.3.8. Job satisfaction

The job satisfaction index measures a worker's general affective reaction to the job without reference to any specific job facet. The four-item 6-point Likert scale job satisfaction index was developed and validated by Quinn and Staines (1979). In the original study, using this facet-free scale, the reliability coefficient was 0.85; the scale's reliability estimate in the current study is 0.91, indicating high internal consistency.

3.3.9. Intention to leave

A 4-item scale, adapted from the one developed by Abrams, Ando, and Hinkle (1998), was used to measure organizational turnover intention. Items included: "In the next few months I intend to leave this organization," "In the next few years I intend to leave this organization," "I occasionally think about leaving this organization," and "I'd like to work in this organization until I reach retirement age." Cronbach's alpha for the present study was 0.77.

3.4. Statistical models

The conceptual model was tested in four consecutive stages. In all stages, direct and indirect paths were tested as presented in the conceptual model (see Fig. 1). In the first stage, the direct and indirect relationships between visible and invisible diversity variables, social support, inclusion–exclusion, fairness, and stress were tested for significance. In the second stage, the direct and indirect paths to the outcome variable well-being were tested. In the third stage, organizational commitment and job satisfaction were included in the model, and the reciprocal relationship between these variables was tested. In the final stage, intention to leave was included in the model.

Latent factors were used to measure social support, inclusion–exclusion, and fairness constructs. Confirmatory factor analyses were performed for each of these constructs. The factor structures obtained using these data confirmed the expected factor patterns that have been published by other researchers (Caplan et al., 1975; Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993). There were three social support factors: supervisor support, peer support, and significant other support. Each of these factors had 4 items with primary loadings. The reliabilities (coefficient alpha) for these factors were 0.90, 0.78, and 0.92, respectively. There were two inclusion–exclusion factors: decision making and information networks. decision making had a reliability of 0.75, whereas information networks had a reliability of 0.61. Finally, there were two fairness factors: distributive justice, which had 4 items, and procedural justice, which had 4 items. The reliabilities for the fairness factors of distributive justice and procedural justice were 0.92, and 0.83, respectively. For each of these analyses, an oblique solution was best therefore the covariances between these factors are included in the models. Taking into consideration the size of the sample, factor scores were calculated for these constructs and were used in the structural equation models as a means to control for degrees of freedom in these models (for a description of the fit indices used in the analysis, please see note).

3.5. Interviews—qualitative analysis

In order to probe more deeply into employees' experiences related to diversity, organizational climate, affective outcomes and intention to leave, individual interviews were conducted (Patton, 1990). The questions were open ended and were designed to elicit individual experiences related to the study's domains (e.g., "Tell me about your experiences working in this agency," "Have you thought of leaving the agency?," "If so, what makes you want to leave?," and "What makes you want to stay?"). The interviews were conducted in privacy with assured confidentiality, and each lasted approximately 45 min. Interviewees were encouraged to provide anecdotes from their own work experience that supported their statements. Mixed methods are used in research for several reasons (Padgett, 2003). Our use of the interviews in the research process was to collect qualitative data that will complement and cross-validate the quantitative data with in-depth illustrations rather than to generate items for an empathic questionnaire (see, for example, Ely, 1994). The use of complementary methods is designed to produce more valid results than either method alone (Jick, 1979).

All interviews were tape recorded with specific permission from the participants, and the tapes were transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method for content analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method is a two-stage strategy to code emerging themes in qualitative data analysis by (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, and (2) integrating categories and their properties. The data are constantly revisited after the initial coding until it is clear that no new themes are emerging (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). After careful scrutiny of each interview, major themes were identified and are presented at the end of the next section to complement and cross-validate the quantitative results.

4. Results

4.1. Stage one

In the first stage, paths between diversity variables, social support, inclusion–exclusion, fairness, and stress constructs were included. This model fit the data very well as reported in Table 2 ($\chi^2 = 40.0$, $df = 40$; RMSEA = 0.00, $AIC - AIC_{SATURATED} = -50.0$) and confirms several of the hypothesized paths (refer to Table 3). The social support factor peer support was significantly predicted by gender ($b = -0.23$), agency position ($b = -0.33$), and education ($b = -0.24$). Women reported more support than men, as did direct service providers, and those with less education. supervisor support was significantly predicted by education; as with peer support, those with less education reported more support ($b = 0.26$). The significant other factors had no significant predictors.

The inclusion–exclusion factors of decision making and information networks were both significantly predicted by supervisor support (b's = 0.43 and 0.29) and peer support (b's = 0.12 and 0.38). Those who perceive more support from their supervisors and their

Table 2
Fit indices of Stage 1–4 models

Model	Description	χ^2	*df*	*p*	χ^2:*df*	RMSEA	AIC	Sat	$AIC_{SATURATED}$	NFI	CFI
Stage 1	Visible and invisible diversity, inclusion–exclusion, social support, stress, and fairness	40.0	40	0.47	1.00	0.00	167.98	208.00	−40.02	0.99	1.00
Stage 2	Outcome variable: well-being	52.4	51	0.42	1.03	0.01	188.38	238.00	−49.62	0.99	1.00
Stage 3	Outcome variables: job satisfaction and organizational commitment	147.2	75	0.00	1.96	0.05	301.19	304.00	−2.81	0.99	0.99
Stage 4	Intention to leave	94.7	85	0.22	1.11	0.12	264.69	340.00	−75.31	0.99	1.00

peers report being more included in both decisions and in information networks. In addition to the social support factors, decision making was also predicted by position and tenure in the organization. Direct service providers reported being more included in making decisions ($b = -1.04$), as did those who have spent less time in the organization. Information networks was also predicted by age: younger participants reported being more involved in the flow of information at the organization ($b = -0.13$). This model accounted for 29% of the variability in decision making and 30% of the variability in information networks.

The fairness factors distributive justice and procedural justice had several significant predictors in common. The invisible diversity variables tenure and agency position were significant predictors. People with longer tenure reported less fairness for both distributive and procedural justice (b's $= -0.03$ and -0.05, respectively), as did direct service providers (b's $= -0.48$ and -0.39). Supervisor support was also a significant predictor of fairness, with those reporting more support from their supervisors perceiving more fairness (b's $= 0.24$ and 0.22). Finally, distributive and procedural justice had decision making as a common predictor. people who participate more in making decisions also report more fairness (b's $= 0.37$ and 0.22). In addition to these common predictors, higher distributive justice scores were predicted by those with less education ($b = -0.19$) and procedural justice was predicted by those with more peer support ($b = 0.14$). This model accounted for 34% of the variability in the distributive justice factor and 26% of the variability in the procedural justice factor.

Stress was significantly predicted by diversity, social support, inclusion–exclusion, and fairness variables. The diversity variable education significantly predicted stress ($b = 5.89$), as did both supervisor support ($b = -3.13$) and peer support ($b = -2.28$). People reporting more support had significantly less stress than those without the support of their supervisors and peers. Feeling more included in decision making and information networks (b's $= -2.42$ and -2.24, respectively) is also associated with decreased stress. Finally, participants who reported more fairness in both distributive justice ($b = -5.24$) and procedural justice ($b = -4.94$) reported less stress. This model accounted for 62% of the variability in the stress scale.

Table 3
Significant paths for final model and variance accounted for

		b	*β*	r^2
Intention to Leave	Age	−0.85	−0.16	0.41
	Decision making	0.48	0.09	
	Stress	0.04	0.13	
	Organizational commitment	−0.23	−0.34	
	Job satisfaction	−0.31	−0.31	
Organizational commitment	Job satisfaction	1.36	0.91	0.40
Job satisfaction	Management/non-management	−3.92	−0.24	0.41
	Distributive justice	1.01	0.19	
	Stress	−0.21	−0.77	
	Well-being	0.23	0.22	
	Organizational commitment	−0.43	−0.64	
Well-being	Decision making	0.84	0.17	0.12
	Stress	−0.06	−0.23	
Stress	Education	5.74	0.16	0.62
	Supervisor support	−3.12	−0.16	
	Peer support	−2.22	−0.12	
	Information networks	−2.30	−0.12	
	Decision making	−2.51	−0.13	
	Distributive justice	−5.32	−0.28	
	Procedural justice	−4.88	−0.26	
Distributive justice	Tenure in organization	−0.03	−0.18	0.34
	Management/non-management	−0.48	−0.16	
	Education	−0.19	−0.10	
	Supervisor support	0.24	0.23	
	Decision making	0.37	0.37	
Procedural justice	Tenure in organization	−0.05	−0.31	0.27
	Management/non-management	−0.40	−0.13	
	Supervisor support	0.23	0.22	
	Peer support	0.14	0.14	
	Decision making	0.21	0.21	
Information networks	Age	−0.13	−0.13	0.30
	Supervisor support	0.29	0.29	
	Peer support	0.38	0.38	
Decision making	Tenure in organization	−0.03	−0.19	0.29
	Management/non-management	−1.04	−0.33	
	Supervisor support	0.43	0.42	
	Peer support	0.12	0.12	
Supervisor support	Education	−0.26	−0.14	0.02
Peer support	Gender	−0.23	−0.10	0.03
	Management/non-management	−0.33	−0.11	
	Education	−0.24	−0.13	

In addition to these significant direct paths, there were several significant correlations in this model, which remained significant throughout the rest of the stages. To test if it was statistically important to include these correlations in the model, a model excluding them, but identical in all other respects to the Stage 1 model, was tested. Unlike the fit of the model that included the correlations, the fit of this correlation free model was extremely poor ($\chi^2=625.8$, $df=95$, RMSEA=0.12, $AIC-AIC_{SATURATED}=435.8$).

Further, the correlation free model fit significantly worse than the model that included the correlations ($\chi^2\Delta = 538.2$, $df\Delta = 10$). Thus, to assure accurate representation of the covariance matrix in these data, it is necessary to include the correlations (see Table 4). Among the diversity variables, age was significantly correlated with tenure ($r = 0.62$), agency position ($r = -0.34$), and education ($r = 0.36$). Older participants tended to have been in the organization longer, were less likely to be managers, and more likely to have higher education. Agency position was also significantly associated with tenure ($r = -0.57$) and education level ($r = -0.26$), and tenure and education were significantly correlated ($r = 0.27$). The social support factors peer support was significantly correlated with supervisor support ($r = 0.19$) and significant other support ($r = 0.13$), but the correlation between supervisor support and significant other support was not significant ($p > 0.05$). Finally, there were significant correlations between the factors in the inclusion–exclusion and fairness constructs. The correlation between decision making and information networks was ($r = 0.26$), and the correlation of distributive and procedural justice was ($r = 0.41$).

4.2. Stage two

In Stage two, the outcome variable well-being was added to the Stage one model (see Fig. 1 conceptual model). This model also fit the data very well ($\chi^2 = 52.4$, $df = 51$, RMSEA = 0.01, $AIC - AIC_{SATURATED} = -49.6$). There were two significant predictors of well-being in Stage two: decision making and stress. Stress appears to mediate the relationship of most of the other variables to well-being ($b = -0.06$), and stress alone accounts for 10% of the variability in well-being. In addition to the indirect path of decision making to well-being through stress, there was also a significant direct effect of decision making ($b = 0.83$) such that those who feel more included in decisions also report a greater sense of well-being. Decision making accounts for 2% of the variability in well-being, so the Stage two model accounts for a total of 12% of the variability in well-being.

4.3. Stage three

In Stage 3, the outcome variables organizational commitment and job satisfaction were added to the model. This model fit the data very well ($\chi^2 = 147.2$, $df = 75$; RMSEA = 0.00, $AIC - AIC_{SATURATED} = -2.8$) and supported several of the hypothesized relationships. Job satisfaction was significantly predicted by agency position (−3.99), distributive justice ($b = 1.07$), stress, ($b = -0.21$), and well-being (0.23). People who were satisfied with their jobs tended to be direct service providers and to perceive more fairness, less stress, and a greater sense of well-being. In addition to these predictors, the hypothesized reciprocal relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment was supported in these data. The path from organizational commitment to job satisfaction ($b = -0.42$) and the path from job satisfaction to organizational commitment ($b = 1.36$) were both significant. Job satisfaction was the only significant predictor of organizational commitment. This model accounted for 40% of the variability in organizational commitment and 41% of the variability in job satisfaction.

Table 4
Correlations among variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.
1. Age	–															
2. Gender	0.10	–														
3. Tenure	0.61**	0.05	–													
4. Department	−0.34**	−0.06	−0.57**	–												
5. Education	0.35**	0.04	0.26**	−0.26**	–											
6. Supervisor support	−0.01	0.03	−0.04	0.09	−0.16**	–										
7. Significant other support	−0.03	−0.06	0.02	−0.05	0.05	0.03	–									
8. Peer support	−0.06	−0.10	0.02	−0.05	−0.10	0.20**	0.14**	–								
9. Decision making	−0.07	0.06	−0.01	−0.21**	−0.06	0.44**	0.02	0.21**	–							
10. Information networks	−0.17	−0.04	−0.09	0.00	−0.13*	0.37**	0.05	0.44**	0.42**	–						
11. Distributive justice	−0.09	0.05	−0.12*	−0.10	−0.16**	0.40**	0.01	0.20**	0.52**	0.26**	–					
12. Procedural justice	−0.22**	0.05	−0.24**	0.00	−0.08	0.34**	0.11*	0.26**	0.37**	0.26**	0.56**	–				
13. Stress	0.24**	0.00	0.19**	0.01	0.25**	−0.49**	−0.05	−0.35**	−0.52**	−0.44**	−0.62**	−0.58**	–			
14. Well-being	0.01	0.05	0.00	−0.05	−0.02	0.17**	0.09	0.03	0.27**	0.15**	0.26**	0.14**	−0.31**	–		
15. Commitment to organization	−0.04	0.03	0.00	−0.14**	−0.12*	0.29**	0.06	0.19**	0.42**	0.24**	0.46**	0.37**	−0.55**	0.27**	–	
16. Job satisfaction	−0.05	0.03	−0.01	−0.17**	−0.07	0.36**	0.12*	0.25**	0.41**	0.26**	0.47**	0.40**	−0.60**	0.34**	0.63**	–
17. Intention to leave	−0.12*	−0.05	−0.07	0.11*	0.08	−0.19**	−0.07	−0.20**	−0.23**	−0.11*	−0.31**	−0.26**	0.43**	−0.32**	−0.56**	−0.56**

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

4.4. Stage four

In this final stage, the outcome intention to leave was added to the model. The main effects for this final model are reported in Table 3. Both job satisfaction ($b=-0.31$) and organizational commitment (-0.23) predicted intention to leave. In addition to these variables, there were direct effects to intention to leave from age, decision making, and stress. Younger participants reported greater intention to leave ($b=-0.85$), as did those who felt more included in decision making ($b=0.48$), and participants with more stress ($b=0.04$). Given that age was the only diversity variable with a direct effect on intention to leave, we tested the indirect effects using the Sobel test (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001), we found that two of the mediated effects of diversity on intention to leave were significant ($p<0.05$). Education had a significant indirect effect, mediated through stress ($Z=2.02$) and agency position had an effect mediated though job satisfaction ($Z=3.35$). People with higher levels of education have higher intention to leave, mediated by the level of stress they report, and managers reported higher intention to leave, though this is mediated by how satisfied they are with their jobs. The final model explained 41% of the variability in intention to leave.

4.5. Results of the qualitative analysis

From the content analysis, several factors emerged as contributing to workers' desire to leave the organization and several other factors as the reason they remain there. A majority of those interviewed commented on work stress as a major reason for job dissatisfaction and low organizational commitment, thus supporting the findings from the quantitative data analysis regarding stress as an important contributor to intention to leave. Their main concern was that there were too many expectations (job overload), too much paperwork and not enough time to do the real work, which they defined as intervening with families and spending quality time with children. Caucasian women with MSW degrees, ranging in age from 25 to 65, made the following comments:

> I didn't expect the high caseload. I thought I would have more time to do direct practice. I certainly didn't realize that there was so much paperwork.

> I have worked 20 hours per week overtime the past two weeks, and still am not able to get the job done. It is physically and mentally exhausting. I feel irritated when the job is not workable within the hours given. The department needs to look at job expectations, and I cannot control that part of my position.

With respect to the perception of unfair practices and procedures in the organization, several employees felt that the promotional system within the organization involved nepotism, favoritism and an unfair political system. Given that the long-term goal of many employees was to move up the ranks of the organization and earn a position as a supervisor, often as a way to deal with the burnout and stress involved in their line jobs, this perception of unfairness was an important element in their desire to leave the organization. While interviewees did not make direct comments about diversity and

exclusion, employees from minority groups were more likely to comment on exclusionary organizational practices. Two examples follow.

One older Asian woman with a Master's degree in marriage and family counseling (MFT) felt that attaining a supervisory position was a difficult goal to reach:

> Supervisory options are few and far between. Positions stay filled, and when an opportunity opens, it is difficult due to known politics behind the selection of supervisors.

A Latina social worker with a BSW concurred:

> People with high levels of expertise cannot always move up; that is why there is such large turnover.

The connection between their stressful jobs and lack of job satisfaction was demonstrated in the interviewees' comments related to the impact of their work conditions on child welfare outcomes. This element may be unique to the field: most workers come to the field wanting to help families and children and when their job conditions do not allow them to do a good job, their job satisfaction suffers. An added dimension is the concern that their stressful work conditions may endanger the children in their care. The following comments add texture to the quantitative findings about the connection between job stress, lack of job satisfaction and intention to leave the organization. A Caucasian woman and a Caucasian man, ranging in age from 45 to 65 both with MSW degrees, made the following statements:

> When I have too much work to do, I can't do a good job. I cannot investigate a home situation well, and I might leave a child in an unsafe home, or take a child out of a home when he or she should actually stay there.

> I am beyond overwhelmed, and proposed changes never seem to be implemented. The children are the ones who lose out.

Some interviewees made comments about the negative impact of the current organizational climate and the negative impact of the high turnover. Many felt that turnover was occurring far too often and became frustrated with the lack of changes being implemented. For example, an African–American woman with an MSW degree stated:

> I am aware of the complexities of the bureaucratic agency and that it is hard to make changes. I understand why it is the way that it is. It is slow to change, but I wish they would take serious steps to focus on internal restructuring. We are losing a lot of employees and there is no relief for the next person, as the work piles up for those who stay.

And a Caucasian female with an MSW noted:

> Turnover for new employees is quite high and those who stay are the ones who have been around forever and may not be as effective as a new worker can be.

Given the multitude of negative comments about their jobs and the organizational environment, we wondered what was keeping workers in their jobs. Several positive

factors emerged from content analysis of the interviewees' responses to this question "What is keeping you in this job and in this organization?" Most of the respondents noted that the clients were the reasons they stayed at their jobs; an Asian female and a Caucasian male (respectively) stated:

> I love the clients and the work that I am doing.

> I am committed to the job and the work I do.

Several participants mentioned good supervision as a key element in keeping them in their jobs. A Caucasian man with an MFT degree noted:

> My supervisors (three in four years) have made the difference in influencing my decision to stay at the organization.

And a younger Caucasian woman with an MSW stated:

> Having a good supervisor makes all the difference. Being supported and having one's needs met is what keeps the workers here.

Older employees were more likely to note the benefits and the flexibility in their jobs as reasons for staying in the organization. They commented on the positive aspects such as the competitive salary and benefits, and the independence and flexibility of their jobs as reasons for remaining with the organization:

> I am staying for the money and the benefits toward retirement.

> I really enjoy the independence of my position and not having to be micro managed. I also enjoy the flexibility and freedom to do my job as I choose.

Finally, the majority of the interviewees, regardless of personal characteristics, expressed satisfaction and pride in having a positive impact and in making a difference in their clients' lives. The following are a few examples:

> I feel as if I am still able to make an impact with the children and their families.

> I love being able to see first hand the progress in a family that is working hard.

> I am fulfilled by my ability to positively affect families' lives.

To varying degrees, these factors bind the workers to the field of public child welfare and enable them to justify continuing their employment while so many others choose to leave.

5. Discussion

This study set out to test a theoretical model of turnover intentions among child welfare workers utilizing diversity characteristics, organizational climate and personal affective variables as predictors. The results sustain most of the hypothesized relation-

ships and indicate that the theoretical model fits the data well. In general, these results support the notion that diverse individual characteristics together with stressful, unjust, exclusionary and non-supportive organizational climate negatively influence individual well-being and lead to lack of job satisfaction and lower organizational commitment, which in turn lead to stronger intentions to leave the job. These results are in line with the aggregate findings that emerged from a meta-analysis of the turnover literature in the areas of child welfare, social work and human services (Mor Barak et al., 2001). While previous studies in this field used mostly correlations and multiple regression analyses to examine a few specific relationships, the current study was one of the first to test the applicability of a theoretical model of turnover intentions among child welfare workers through simultaneous modeling. The qualitative interviews provide a deeper perspective not only to why employees may want to leave but also into what makes them stay. Campbell & Russo (1999) indicate that the use of mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative, is important since all methods are imperfect and combining them greatly enhances a study's ability to generate and test theory.

The strongest direct predictors of intention to leave, based on the quantitative analysis, were lack of job satisfaction, low organizational commitment, younger age, high stress and exclusion from the organizational decision-making process. These findings were echoed by the qualitative data indicating that stress (too much work, not enough time to do it), dissatisfaction with the job (too much paper work not enough face to face time with clients), being younger (older workers saw advantage in staying and keeping their benefits) and low organizational commitment (feeling committed to the field of child welfare, not to the organization) were all major contributors to intention to leave. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that demonstrate the connection between job dissatisfaction (Blankertz & Robinson, 1996; Fuller, Hester, Dickson, Allison, & Birdseye, 1996; Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Kiyak et al., 1997), lack of organizational commitment (Bloom, 1996; Geurts, Schaufeli, & Rutte, 1999; Stremmel, 1991; Tett & Meyer, 1993), being younger and less vested in the organization (Gray & Phillips, 1994; Ito et al., 2001; Krecker, 1994; Lane, 1998; Tyler & Cushway, 1998), and high stress (Lee & Ashforth, 1993a,b; McKee et al., 1992; Todd & Deery-Schmitt, 1996) with both intention to leave and turnover. The link between stress and intention to leave is particularly relevant here since it has been widely recognized that jobs in the child welfare system are typically very stressful with large caseloads, intense responsibility and heavy administrative work (Cohen & Austin, 1994; GAO, 2003; Samantrai, 1992).

With respect to the diversity variables, while only one diversity characteristic (age) was directly linked to intention to leave (in both the qualitative and quantitative analyses), several diversity characteristics were linked to the organizational climate variables and to the personal affective variables, thereby indirectly affecting intention to leave. Our findings are in line with the results of the meta-analysis of previous turnover studies in the area of child welfare, social work and human services that indicated a mild to non-statistically significant direct relationship between diversity characteristics and intention to leave and actual turnover (Mor Barak et al., 2001). However, the authors of the meta-analysis speculate that diversity may affect intention to leave in an indirect rather than direct way: "That is, if treated unfairly within the organization, women and members of minority and oppressed groups feel less job satisfaction, less organizational commitment,

and more stress and burnout, and these feelings affect their decision to leave the organization" (Mor Barak et al., 2001, p. 30). Our findings, both the qualitative and the quantitative, lend credence to this line of reasoning. Specifically, older workers felt less included in information networks, women employees felt lack of peer support compared to their male counterparts, and those who have more tenure with the organization felt less included in the decision-making process as well as perceived the organization as less fair with respect to both procedural and distributive justice. The verbal testimonies from the interviewees indicate that although none of the participants articulated a link between diversity and exclusion or unfair treatment, members of minority groups and women were more likely to note unfairness in the promotion and reward systems. Stating that nepotism was used in allocating rewards and job promotions, women and members of minority groups more often expressed their frustration at being excluded from networks of influence in the organization. These findings seem to suggest an indirect rather than direct relationship between diversity and intention to leave.

Given the stressful work conditions and unyielding organizational system, why do people stay in child welfare agencies? Only a handful of other studies on turnover in child welfare have directly examined the question of why people stay in their organizations (Dickinson & Perry, 1998; Ellett, 2001; Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994; Smith, 2005). Other studies have extrapolated why employees stayed from the variables that had low or negative relationships with intention to leave and turnover, but very few have asked specifically what caused workers to *stay* despite the stressful job and difficult organizational environment. It is important to make this distinction, as *staying* is an active process that is decidedly different from simply *not leaving*. Developing a better understanding of why workers stay is key to promoting retention. The qualitative data in our study open a window to understanding some of those reasons and provide unique depth of understanding, since only two other qualitative studies in recent years have examined retention (Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994). Good supervision was noted by the interviewees as an important reason for people to stay in the organization and supported by the quantitative data that showed a significant connection between supervisor's support and stronger sense of inclusion in the organization. Benefits and flexibility were also noted by some of the older interviewees, as noted earlier. However, by far the most important single reason that draws workers to – and keeps them in – the child welfare system is their devotion to the children and families they serve and the success they achieve in making a difference in their clients' lives (Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994).

Finally, it is important to emphasize the difference between examining intention to leave as the outcome variable versus actual turnover. Intention to leave has consistently been the best predictor of actual turnover (see, e.g., Kiyak et al., 1997). This might suggest that deciding to leave one's job in the field of human services is not an impulsive act but a decision that one has been contemplating for quite some time prior to taking action (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999). At the same time, not all workers who express a desire to leave the organization will actually act on their intent. The latter will depend on perceived and actual job alternatives and vested financial interests in their current organization, such as retirement benefits. There is an added element that may be unique to the helping professions, particularly to the field of child welfare. In this emotionally intense field, employees often feel a greater responsibility for and commitment to their

clients than they do towards their work organization. As demonstrated by the qualitative comments in this study, the conflict between organizational conditions (e.g., high caseloads) and workers' own professional expectations may lead employees to keep up with their very demanding work commitments at the expense of their own emotional health, with high levels of burnout as a result. Therefore, studying intention to leave is important not only as a precursor to actual turnover but as an indicator of a workforce that may not be working at its full potential, thus possibly affecting their own well-being as well as client outcomes.

5.1. Strengths and limitations

There are some important limitations of this study that may affect its validity. The use of cross-sectional data does not allow for inferences regarding causality, thereby limiting the study's internal validity. Also, the use of non-probability sampling limits the study's external validity—the ability to generalize to the larger population. The study's sample came from a large urban child welfare department and the participants self-selected into the study. It is not known whether these results are representative of smaller public departments in non-urban areas or of private agencies, urban or non-urban, though it is known that large caseloads and high turnover are typical of most child welfare agencies. Therefore, the ability to generalize from the sample to the entire employee pool, as well as to the field of child welfare, is somewhat compromised. One other limitation is that of mono-method bias, which results when the same individuals serve as the source of information for both the independent and dependent variables, and all responses are answered in the self-report style.

The study's strengths include testing a theoretical model and the use of mixed methods—both qualitative and quantitative. The study tested a theoretical model of intentions to leave among child welfare workers, and offers findings in some areas that have rarely been examined among this population. It also employs advanced statistical methods that allow for the testing of a complete model. The hypotheses tested in this study were based on existing theoretical literature and were specified a priori, therefore allowing somewhat more confidence in the findings than might otherwise have been possible. Further, the study employed mixed methods to identify correlates of intention to leave among child welfare workers. The use of complementary methods provides support and cross-validation (Barbour, 1999; Padgett, 2003), so that findings are likely to be more valid than with either method alone (Jick, 1979). Clearly, no method of inquiry is perfect and combining two different methods can enhance the study's capacity for generating and testing theory (Campbell & Russo, 1999).

5.2. Implications for policy, practice, and future research

The current study provides some clues as to what can be done to reduce the high turnover rates in public child welfare (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Regehr, Leslie, Howe, & Chau, 2000), particularly when the results of the quantitative analysis are examined in conjunction with the qualitative interviews. A positive organizational climate not only affects staff but holds promise for client outcomes, as well (Glisson & Hemmelgarn,

1998). Therefore, child welfare agencies should focus on reducing the elements that increase workers' intention to leave such as stress, exclusion, unfair practices, job dissatisfaction, and lack of organizational commitment.

The qualitative comments indicate that workers wish for lower case loads, less administrative paperwork and more face-to-face time with their clients. However, when we presented preliminary results of this study to managers in child welfare agencies, their immediate reaction was "easier said than done." Indeed, the child welfare system has serious problems and has been characterized as "a homeostatic system in which the difficulties that have developed reinforce one another" (Schorr, 2000, p. 131). Furthermore, in today's realities of budget cuts and hiring freezes, it may be unrealistic to suggest lower case loads and more staff support to reduce the administrative paper work. While these should remain long-term goals for improvement and change in the child welfare field, some more limited implications can be drawn from our findings that can be implemented even in today's dire realities.

One such area is supervisory relationships. Workers' comments indicate that good supervision can go a long way towards job satisfaction, organizational commitment and reducing intention to leave. Ironically, supervisors play crucial roles in mentoring and supporting staff, yet usually receive little, if any, formal supervisory training (Landsman, 2001). Nonetheless, strong supervision may be one of the most important elements in staff retention. A trusting relationship with a supervisor can help create a sense of satisfaction in a subordinate (Tan & Tan, 2000). Career ladders can be used creatively and simultaneously to support stronger mentoring roles for supervisors and to enhance the skills of personnel at all levels. While supervisory training may be offered in many agencies, not enough attention is given to selection and assignment of supervisors. Specifically, the sentiment that emerged from the interviews was that workers are often promoted to supervisory positions based on seniority and political connections rather than on skills and qualifications. Changing the selection process will improve both the quality of supervision and the perception of organizational fairness in promotion procedures. Also, assigning supervisors and supervisees based on fit in the dyadic relationship rather than arbitrary administrative needs can improve workers' sense of support and job satisfaction (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). A well-qualified and well-trained supervisor can also guide workers in better dealing with their caseloads through prioritizing tasks and developing time-management skills.

Finally, less frequent internal structural changes that often result in client handoffs could improve workers' ability to work with the same clients over time. As indicated by the qualitative interviews, what connects workers and keeps them working in the child welfare field despite the stressful conditions is their deep sense of responsibility and commitment to the children and families that they serve. Many child welfare agencies around the nation experience high turnover in their top management levels as well. When new managers begin their jobs, they often implement structural changes that by the time they trickle down to line workers are being translated to multiple case handoffs between specialized departments. In addition to the inefficiencies such handoffs create, gaps in information flow and repeated tasks, a serious implication for line workers is that their relationships with clients are being interrupted affecting the emotional bond as well as their ability to see a case through to a stable if not happy outcome. This lack of consistency

and stability of workers is likely to impact workers' satisfaction, the quality of services provided, and ultimately, child welfare outcomes (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998).

Research on turnover and intention to leave in the child welfare area is sorely needed. While it is clear that high turnover is a serious problem in this field, the body of literature in this field is lacking, primarily because of the limited amount of research that has been conducted (Mor Barak et al., 2001). More research is needed that examines conceptual models, either replicating the model tested in this study or examining other models. There is also need for longitudinal research, particularly studies that follow the same employees over time, in order to establish cause and effect relationships between predictor variables and intention to leave. Such longitudinal studies can also assist in examining the relationship between intention to leave and actual turnover in the child welfare field since intention to leave alone accounts for only a portion of actual turnover, and the other variables such as job alternatives have rarely been studied. Future studies should also focus on the turnover construct. This is particularly important in the child welfare field since turnover is composed of three elements – leaving the job, leaving the field of child welfare, or leaving the social work profession altogether – and there is a need to disentangle the relationship between these components in order to generate effective prevention strategies.

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Appendix A. Notes

A.1. Fit indices used in the structural equations model (SEM) analysis

This study used several fit indices to ascertain the fit of the conceptual model to the data. Using multiple indices ensures that the fit of a model was not dependent on just a few features of the model, but looked at several different aspects of the model including goodness of fit, badness of fit, and comparisons of the sample and population to the best and worst fitting models. The χ^2 statistic measures the fit of the model to the current sample's data. A good fit is indicated by a χ^2 with a probability (p-value) greater than 0.05 and a χ^2:df ratio of less than 2.0. Because the χ^2 is sensitive to sample size, we also included the more robust RMSEA, which is a population-based index of badness of fit. Estimates of fit are based on the error of approximation making the RMSEA much less sensitive to sample size than the χ^2 statistic. The RMSEA also includes a parsimony adjustment, so that it favors simpler models over more complex models. The RMSEA of a good fitting model should ideally be <0.05, though a fit of <0.08 is considered acceptable (Loehlin, 1998). Unlike the χ^2 and RMSEA, other indices use comparison as a way to

measure fit. The NFI and CFI compare the model to that of the independence model. The independence model represents a baseline of the worst possible fitting model, which fixes all means to zero and assumes that the measured variables in the model are uncorrelated. The NFI is a sample-based comparison and the CFI is a population-based comparison; for both, a score of 0.90 or better is considered a good fit. The final index used was Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC). This is also an index that tests the badness of fit of a model, but unlike the RMSEA, this badness is measured in comparison to the fit of the saturated model. The saturated model is the most general model given the variables, placing no constraints on the population moments. This means that it will fit any data perfectly. Thus, the higher the AIC, as compared to the AIC of the saturated model, the worse the fit. The AIC also has a parsimony adjustment. A good fit is indicted with $AIC_{MODEL} - AIC_{SATURATED}$ is a negative number, indicating less than zero badness of fit.

Appendix B. Distribution of measures

	M	SD
Age (years)	38.8	11.3
Tenure (years)	6.1	6.7
Supervisor support	11.60	3.3
Significant other support	13.73	3.2
Peer support	12.19	2.5
Decision making	13.02	4.9
Information networks	13.88	3.1
Distributive justice	14.12	6.2
Procedural justice	13.18	4.85
Stress	79.32	18.8
Well-being	32.77	5.1
Commitment to organization	27.26	7.9
Job satisfaction	15.81	5.3
Intention to leave	12.68	5.4

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