



Impact of Public Perceptions on Child Welfare Workers

Lawrence, C. K., Zeitlin, W., Auerbach, C., Chakravarty, S., & Rienks, S. (2018). Measuring the impact of public perceptions on child welfare workers. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

Can the public's perception of child welfare workers impact turnover? The authors validated the use of the Public Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale with survey data from 2,910 public child welfare workers in three different states and explored how societal perceptions of child welfare work related to workers' job satisfaction and intent to leave.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

The Public Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale was designed to measure workers' beliefs about how the public views their work. Results indicated four domains: blame, stigma, nature of work, and respect.

BLAME

When a child welfare tragedy occurs, workers can be targeted and often feel blamed directly by the media. This perceived blame can heighten workers' feelings of job insecurity and cause them to consider leaving their jobs.

STIGMA

Stigma-by-association occurs when those in close contact with people who are socially devalued are also stigmatized. Child welfare workers experience this stigma due to their work with involuntary clients who are often vilified.

NATURE OF THE WORK

How workers perceive their jobs may influence turnover. Workers want meaningful work that makes a difference in the lives of others, and the correlation between higher perceived public respect and lower intent to leave the public child welfare job may reflect this need.

RESPECT

Although it is important for staff to feel respected from within their own organization, this study suggests the significance of respect within the social or public environment as well.



WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Multiple factors influence workers' sense of commitment, job satisfaction, and intent to stay, including perceptions of themselves and others, their sense of self-efficacy, feeling supported by peers, and experiences with supervisors and their organizational climates. In order to retain workers and strengthen the workforce, agencies should acknowledge the strong influence public perceptions have on the workforce. The agency's workforce will feel valued and supported by building mutual and reciprocal respect between agency staff and the community within a collaborative network. Use the "[Explore Community Context](#)" worksheet from the [NCWWI Workforce Development Planning and Assessment Tool Kit](#) to consider how your agency's policies and structures promote a positive community context.