

**Internal Reliability of the OCFS Competency-  
Based Interview for Hiring Child Welfare  
Caseworkers**

By

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## Introduction

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Prior to 1995 there was not a standardized hiring practice across the state for hiring child welfare caseworkers in Maine. The lack of a standardized process, as well as the lack of standardized screening criteria, created frustration whenever a vacancy occurred. In 1995 the Bureau of Human Resources agreed to collaborate with the Department of Human Services in creating a new approach for screening applicants. Staff at the Child Welfare Training Institute became involved with the redesign of the screening process and advocated that the new process be standardized, based on job analysis, use multiple job-related assessments, and focus on specific competencies (Bernotavicz & Wischmann, 2000).

A child welfare caseworker competency model that identified thirty-four competencies had already been developed in Maine, and DHHS supervisors and CWTI staff together selected nine of these competencies to use in the redesign of the screening process (Bernotavicz & Wischmann, 2000). The group then designed a structured Panel Interview that included three activities: Standard Interview, Fact Finding Interview, and Case Analysis. The Panel Interview was implemented in 1995 statewide. In 2002 staff at CWTI and DHHS engaged in a comprehensive review and revision of the Panel Interview materials including updating the core competencies, the questions and the cases. See Appendix A for the Panel Interview Score Sheet, which reflects the current competencies.

The Panel Interview begins with a candidate reviewing fictitious case materials. A team of two or three supervisors then interviews the candidate. During this interview, 45 minutes are spent asking the candidate questions about their past experience in order to screen for competencies. The remainder of the interview, 15 minutes, provides the candidate an opportunity to ask questions pertaining to the fictitious case materials. The candidate then

spends 30 minutes completing a written exercise, which consists of writing a case summary regarding the fictitious case. Each supervisor on the team uses a score sheet to rate the candidate in each of the competency areas, 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest rating. Each candidate is given a composite score, based on the standard interview, fact-finding interview, and the written exercise. The Panel engages in a consensus discussion to resolve wide discrepancies in scores. The composite scores of the three supervisors are averaged so that the candidate has one score. The highest possible score is 150; the lowest score to be considered for a position is 80.

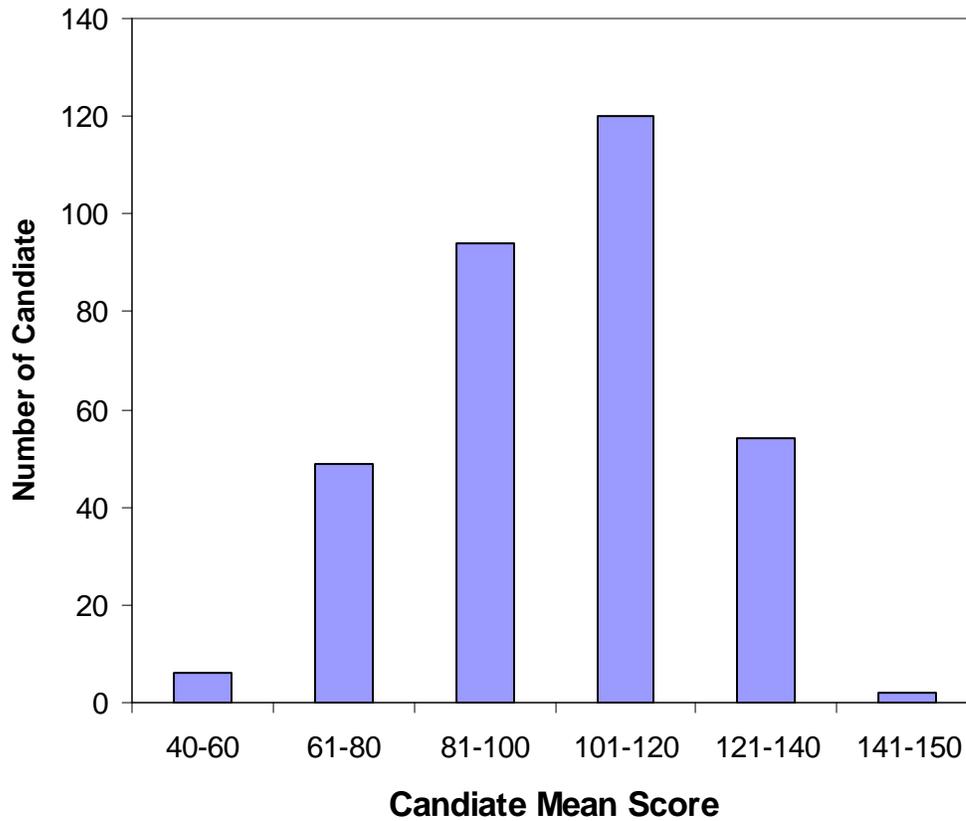
When using a standardized screening process, it is important to determine the reliability of the process. In the Panel Interview screening, it is crucial that supervisors in each District are viewing the competencies in the same way, and are scoring candidates in the same way. A candidate is scored by supervisors during the Panel Interview, and the scoring between each rater should be consistent. In 1995 a study was done to assess the reliability of the process, and it was found that there was a high degree of reliability among the supervisors' ratings. There was little variation among the competencies, indicating a high correlation among the scoring of the competencies.

The purpose of this study is to examine the reliability of the revised process. The updates were completed in the Fall of 2004 and in the Winter of 2006. This report uses a total of 325 panel interviews conducted in eight Districts between March 2006 and June 2008. This report is concerned with quantitative analysis of data provided by Panel Interview score sheets. Candidate scores are described and evaluated by, candidate, and by competencies.

## Findings

The mean scores of all candidates were analyzed in order to look at the overall scoring of candidates. Figure 1 describes the mean scores of all candidates.

**Figure 1: Candidate Mean Scores**



Discussion: The mean candidate scores are normally distributed. The mean candidate score for all 325 candidates is 100.9, with a standard deviation of 21.7. The minimum score of all districts is 35, the maximum score 150. Of the 325 candidates who were interviewed, 44 of these candidates were hired. The mean score for hired candidates is 117.1, with a standard deviation of 15.2 The lowest score for hired candidates is 82.0.

## Comparison of Scores of Field Instruction Unit (FIU) Graduates

The Field Instruction Unit is a collaborative program between the DHHS and the University of Maine. Each year, approximately 14 University of Maine Social Work students participate in internships at DHHS. These students are paid a stipend, which requires each student to commit to eighteen months of employment at DHHS following their graduation. District 6 (Bangor) and District 2 (Portland) each have FIU units. As these students near graduation, they are required to participate in Panel Interviews to assess their suitability for the job. The mean scores of all FIU candidates will not be analyzed for reliability since only one student applied from March 2006- June 2008 and was not hired.

### Comparison of Scores of Candidates by District

Comparisons of Scores of Candidates by District were not analyzed since district boundaries and numbers were changed in 2007.

### Comparison of Scores of Candidates by Gender

Comparisons of Score of Candidates by Gender were not analyzed due to the low number of male candidates and that gender was not self identified.

### Correlations between Competencies

Candidates are assessed according to ten competencies:

I-	Interpersonal Relations	MI-	Sense of Mission
S-	Self-Awareness/Confidence	C-	Communication Skills
AN-	Analytic Thinking	MO-	Motivation
AD-	Adaptability	P-	Planning & Organizing
O-	Observational Skills	T-	Teamwork

**Table 1**

	I	S	AN	AD	O	MI	C	MO	P	T
I										
S	0.817									
AN	0.749	0.770								
AD	0.772	0.795	0.842							
O	0.631	0.636	0.850	0.744						
MI	0.680	0.706	0.741	0.709	0.660					
C	0.699	0.694	0.713	0.705	0.635	0.623				
MO	0.758	0.797	0.776	0.789	0.679	0.753	0.682			
P	0.687	0.706	0.828	0.756	0.826	0.684	0.686	0.741		
T	0.722	0.740	0.754	0.756	0.668	0.730	0.659	0.758	0.727	

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All Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion: Each candidate is given a total score for each competency by averaging values of all raters on each instrument. These scores were correlated with each other to examine possible relationships between competencies. All ten competencies correlated with each other at .6 or higher. The competency Sense of Mission has the weakest correlation with the other competencies.

**Intraclass correlation (ICC) between raters.**

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## **Recommendations**

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It appears that the Panel Interview process is a reliable tool for selecting appropriate candidates for child welfare positions in Maine. The next step in analyzing the Panel Interview process is to determine whether the scores of the competencies in the screening process accurately predict performance on the job. Next steps would include developing a tool that would enable supervisors to report hired candidates' strengths and weaknesses in regards to the ten competency areas.

