



COVID-19 Lessons Learned for Child Welfare

He, A. S., Cederbaum, J. A., & Leake, R. (2022). Transformative lessons learned from COVID-19 to reimagine child welfare work. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1-22.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This resource explores child welfare caseworkers' perspectives on how organizational changes during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic affected their work. It also provides recommendations for sustained organizational change child welfare programs can make to improve practice and policy.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

The researchers conducted a narrative analysis of survey data from direct care child welfare caseworkers about workforce needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic (N=783). Data was collected in May 2020 from four public child welfare agencies across the United States. Of the sample, 92% of the respondents identified as female and 43% as a person of color.

Three themes emerged on COVID-19's impact on the workplace:

Limited job changes

workers' responses indicated there was no change, limited change, or change with positive outcome to their core job functions

Challenges

workers discussed difficulties engaging with clients, conducting assessments, meeting with families, and using technology

Worker well-being

workers described safety concerns, job stress, and anxiety about the future

Recommendations for permanent workplace changes:



Workplace flexibility (work from home, flex, or hybrid schedule)



Better use of technology (virtual meetings and supporting remote access)



Worker well-being (support for worker safety and work-life balance and integration)

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

The pandemic demonstrated that, when responding to a natural disaster, even large and complex systems like child welfare can make pivotal change happen quickly and effectively. The study highlights the longer-term policy and practice changes the COVID-19 pandemic caused and the impact the global pandemic is still having on the child welfare workforce. Study implications include the need for flexible remote work options, virtual platforms for child welfare work, and better utilization of technology to support child welfare workers' well-being.