



Measuring Child Welfare Workers Physiological Stress

Griffiths, A., Link, K., Haughtigan, K., Beer, O., Powell, L., & Royse, D. (2023). Physiological evidence of escalating stress during COVID-19: A longitudinal assessment of child welfare workers. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1-24.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

Researchers at the Kentucky Child Welfare Workforce Wellness Initiative explored physiological stress among child welfare professionals (n = 32) before and after the removal of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in June 2021.

Study participants wore biometric analytic devices to track physiological indicators of job stress over four months (May to August 2021). COVID-19 restrictions were lifted two weeks after the first data collection in May.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

From June to August, participants' **stress escalated** and their **relaxation decreased**.

In August, participants averaged:

About **17.5 hours per day** in a state of elevated physiological stress, suggesting they experienced elevated stress **even when they were sleeping**.



Less than 2 hours (1.87 hours) per day in a state of physiological relaxation.

Less than 8 hours (7.55 hours) of sleep per day, which did not result in adequate recovery.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

The child welfare workforce's health and wellness is critical to individual workers and the families they serve. If unaddressed, the accumulation of chronic stress may lead to:

Turnover and retention problems

Poor health for workers

Negative outcomes for families and children

It is imperative for organizational leaders to:

Support self-care at the systems level



Work with staff to identify and alleviate sources of job stress



Consider the impact policy changes, such as lifting COVID-19 restrictions on face-to-face contact with families that required workers to pivot back to in-person service delivery, can have on worker's health.

