

**Raymond A. Kent School of Social Work, University of Louisville**  
**Child Welfare Worker Retention Study**

Dana Sullivan, Ph.D.

Phone: (502) 852-2920; E-mail: [dana.Sullivan@louisville.edu](mailto:dana.Sullivan@louisville.edu)

**COLLABORATORS:** Kent School: Anita Barbee, Ph.D., Pamela Yankeelov, Ph.D.

**BACKGROUND:** The purpose of this research was to examine the factors that predict employee retention, turnover, and movement through the organization by new employees. A review of secondary data was conducted at the Kent School of Social Work, University of Louisville and the Department of Community Based Services (DCBS), Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS).

**METHODOLOGY:**

- This study focused specifically on retention among a sample of child protection workers in the state of Kentucky.
- The primary research question: what are the variables that predict job retention in child welfare workers in Kentucky?
- Utilized a non-experimental, prospective research design.
- In Phase one of this study, new child welfare workers were asked to complete several measures during one of their core trainings, including gender, race, education, length of employment, geographic location, rank/position, perceived job satisfaction, training, personality traits, and supervisor and co-worker support.
- In Phase two of this study, employee retention records were obtained and matched to each individual's Phase one data. Groups were identified on the basis of worker retention—those who have remained with the organization and those who are no longer with the organization.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

- The sample was drawn from the population of all new employees hired by the agency between the years of 1996 and 2000. About 976 employees, with usable data, participated in the training during this time period. The 976 participants were classified into three distinct categories, specifically stayers (N= 640), leavers (N = 345) and returners (N = 21; operationalized as employees who stayed in the agency for a period of time, left the agency for a period of time and returned to the agency). Approximately 57% (N = 270) of the sample was categorized as stayers and they worked an average of 20.78 months (SD = 8.73) at the point of data collection, while 43% (N = 200) of the sample was categorized as leavers and they averaged 15.36 months of work (SD = 12.39) before exiting the agency.
- A major finding of this study is the importance of the supervisor relationship in deciding to stay or leave the agency. Those who stayed were more attached to their co-workers and supervisors. They also received more guidance from their supervisor and felt as if they could rely on them.
- Rural workers scored higher than urban workers regarding their attachment to their supervisor. There were also trends indicating that rural workers receive more guidance on treatment plans and more assistance interpreting policies than their urban counterparts. In addition, those who stayed in the urban region were more satisfied with their relationship with their supervisor than those who left the agency. Those who remained on the job also viewed their supervisor as more competent and they were more satisfied with their relationship with their supervisor than those who left the agency. Rural hires scored higher in both of these areas than did the urban workers.
- The past literature and the results from this study indicate the strength of the relationship with the supervisor and the type of support offered by the supervisor are key factors in the decision to remain on the job in a child welfare agency or to leave the agency.

**USEFULNESS TO CABINET:**

- No study of this nature had ever been done in child welfare.
- The strengths of this study lies in the breath and depth of the predictors explored.
- A unique aspect of this study's design is the use of the prospective data to explore retention rates.
- The most consistent predictor was supervision. The impact of supervisors and teams on worker retention is a key finding from this study.