



# The influence of job satisfaction on child welfare worker's desire to stay: An examination of the interaction effect of self-efficacy and supportive supervision

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## ABSTRACT

Prior research shows child welfare workforce has constantly been challenged by worker's turnover issue. Although improving job satisfaction is adopted by many agencies as a solution to encourage workers to stay, little is known whether its effect remains under the influence of certain psychosocial factors of workers. The present study attempts to explore the effect of job satisfaction on child welfare worker's desire to stay through examining the intervening effects of worker's work related self-efficacy and supervisor's support. Our findings showed that the interaction effect did exist such that job satisfaction had greater positive impact for workers of high self-efficacy in terms of the desire to stay. Findings further revealed that job satisfaction had substantial impacts on improving worker's desire to stay under most of the circumstances, except for the circumstance when workers concurrently perceiving low work related self-efficacy and low supervisor's support. Finding also revealed that supervisor's support was particularly important to retain workers of low self-efficacy. In conclusion, improving job satisfaction may not be a universal approach for worker retention due to the influence of worker's self-efficacy. On the other hand, we recognize that supervisor's support is an important factor in addition to job satisfaction that cannot be overlooked in child welfare worker retention. In light of the significant interaction effect that was identified in the present study, we suggested the need to examine the interaction effect among retention predictors in future research.

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## 1. Introduction

Child welfare employee turnover is a substantial issue (American Public Human Services Association, 2005; Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Chronic stress, inadequate pay, lack of recognition, increased job demand and other negative job characteristics are identified as reasons relating to worker's turnover (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Ellett, 2001; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). The turnover of child welfare workers might lead to the disruption of the continuity and quality of care for children, increasing agency's training and replacement costs (Ellett, 2001); it also could decrease the organizational effectiveness and staff productivity of the child welfare agencies (Balfour & Neff, 1993). Thus, obtaining effective solutions for staff retention has been a topic of concern in child welfare.

In the past, improving worker's job satisfaction has been used as a solution for retention (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984). Not only because literature showed job satisfaction was an important correlate for employee retention (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001), turnover was also found to be strongly predicted by employees' dissatisfaction with their salaries, benefits, and promotion (Weiner, 1980; Phillips, Howes, & Whitebook, 1991; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003; Stremmel,

1991). Meta-analytic study by Mor Barak et al. (2001) concluded from the findings of prior studies further confirmed job dissatisfaction as one of the strongest single predictors for worker's turnover in human service working environments.

Although empirical evidences have recognized the importance of job satisfaction for worker retention, there is scarce information about the interaction effect between job satisfaction and other retention relevant factors in the literature. In the present study, we suspect certain psychosocial factors of child welfare workers may interact with the effect of job satisfaction on influencing worker's desire to remain in the agency. To test our hypothesis, we examine the effect of job satisfaction through the exploration of the interaction effect between job satisfaction and two important psychosocial correlates which have been discussed in the literature: worker's work related self-efficacy (Fryer, Miyoshi, & Thomas, 1989; Cherniss, 1993) and supervisor's support (Samantrai, 1992; Rycraft, 1994; Gibbs, 2001; Kleinpeter, Pasztor, & Telles-Rogers, 2003; McCarthy, 2003; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003, 2007). A brief review of the literature about the relation of these two variables and worker retention is presented in the next section.

### 1.1. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's beliefs about whether she or he could successfully perform a specific task (Bandura, 1977).

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Perceived self-efficacy could influence one's decision making, resilience to adversity, or vulnerability to stress (Bandura, 1998). Particularly, one's belief in her or his capability of performing professional work roles plays an important role in ameliorating work burnout (Cherniss, 1993; Grau, Salanova, & Peiro, 2001).

In previous studies, it was discovered that high self-efficacy was associated with problem-focused coping which helped individuals to successfully deal with stress (Chwalisz, Altmaier, & Russell, 1992), while, low self-efficacy was associated with avoidant coping which was a poor coping strategy to stress (Martin, 1999). Individuals of high self-efficacy were found less likely to become unemployed and were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2003).

The relationship between self-efficacy and child welfare worker retention is further confirmed by child welfare research. It was found that a primary reason for child welfare worker to remain in the field was their confidence in the working ability in contributing to the well-being of children in need (Fryer et al., 1989). Furthermore, worker's high self-efficacy toward work was found by research to relate to lower emotional exhaustion (Lo Schiavo, 1996), while emotional exhaustion was identified by research as an important factor relating to child welfare worker's job exits (Drake & Yadama, 1996).

In light of the literature that one's self-efficacy has great influence on one's mental health so as to influence one's professional work role. The present study suspects worker's self-efficacy with regard to work may interact with worker's job satisfaction in terms of their desire to stay so that the effect of job satisfaction may be different for workers of different levels of (high/low) work related self-efficacy. To test this hypothesis, in the present study, we plan to examine the interaction effect between worker's work related self-efficacy and job satisfaction in terms of worker's desire to stay.

### 1.2. Supervisor's support

Supervision also has been identified as an important correlate associating with child welfare worker's attrition rates (Gibbs, 2001; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). Various reasons are proposed to explain the role of supervisor in this relationship, such as: Adequate supervision provides workers guidance, preventing them from becoming lost in the maze of demands and responsibilities for child welfare practice (Rycraft, 1994). Supervisors play the role of messengers, delivering positive messages to improve worker's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Gibbs, 2001). Supervisors are also a bridge between executive management and front line workers, who pass on the dominant culture of the organization to new workers (McCarthy, 2003).

The relationship between supervisors and worker retention is further supported by empirical evidences. It was found that the effect of supportive supervision outweighed the effect of pre-service or in-service training on child welfare worker retention (Kleinpeter et al., 2003; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). Supportive supervision was found relating to the improvement of worker's job satisfaction (Munn, Barber, & Fritz, 1996), lower levels of worker's burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1988), and the reduction of stress (Moen & Yu, 2000). Studies also showed a positive relationship with the supervisor was an important rationale influencing child welfare worker's decisions to remain in the job (Samantrai, 1992; Rycraft, 1994; Gibbs, 2001; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007).

Based on the literature, the present study suspects worker's perception of supervisor's support may interact with worker's perception of job satisfaction in terms of worker's desire to stay so that the effect of job satisfaction may be different for workers perceiving different levels (high/low) of supervisor's support. To test this hypothesis, the present study plans to explore whether an interaction effect exists between supervisor's support and job satisfaction with regard to worker's desire to stay.

### 1.3. Summary

In brief, the present study comprises two primary hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that worker's job satisfaction, work related self-efficacy and supervisor's support have significant influence on worker's desire to stay. Second, we hypothesize significant interaction effects exist among worker's job satisfaction, work related self-efficacy, and supervisor's support in terms of their desire to stay.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research site and instrument

The present study utilized secondary data from an ongoing longitudinal study conducted by the Texas Protective Services Training Institute since November 2001. This evaluation involved distributing survey questionnaires at different time points to collect responses of Child Protective Service (CPS) workers after their participation in the Texas Child Protective Services Basic Skills Development (BSD) job training program. The survey questionnaires were developed by a team of researchers with inputs from CPS, BSD trainers, and Texas Department of Family and Protective Services administrators. The present study derived research variables from this data set to study the responses of CPS workers who completed the BSD training between November 2001 and March 2008.

### 2.2. Variables

The variables of this study were derived from the survey items filled out by CPS workers one year after the BSD training. The present study comprises four research variables, including one dependent variable (worker's desire to stay) and three independent variables (worker's job satisfaction, worker's self-efficacy with regard to CPS work, and worker's perception of supervisor's support). The dependent variable (worker's desire to stay) is a continuous variable deriving from the score of one questionnaire item. The score range is from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 4 indicating strongly agree. The variable of worker's self-efficacy with regard to CPS work is a two level categorical variable deriving from the composite score of twelve questionnaire items and then grouping the composite score into two levels (low, high). The score range of each item included is from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 4 indicating strongly agree.

The variable of worker's perception of supervisor's support is a two level categorical variable deriving from the composite score of six questionnaire items that measures worker's perception of levels of supervisor's support. The variable of supervisor's support is developed via grouping the composite scores into two levels (low, high). The score range of each questionnaire item included is from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 4 indicating strongly agree. The variable of worker's job satisfaction is a two level categorical variable deriving from the composite score of twelve items on the questionnaire measuring worker's job satisfaction. The same as the other two independent variables, the job satisfaction variable is developed via grouping sample's composite scores into two levels (low, high). Each questionnaire item has a score ranges from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 4 indicating strongly agree. Please refer to Table 1 for the survey items included in each research variable.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Sample characteristics

The present study comprised the survey data of 455 CPS workers. Due to most of the participants failed to report their demographic information, such as: age, the present study included the available demographic

**Table 1**  
Survey items.

Variable	Item	
STAY	I plan on staying in CPS for the next six months.	
SE	I am capable of assessing sexual abuse cases.	
	I am capable of assessing physical abuse cases.	
	I am capable of assessing neglect cases.	
	I am capable of assessing substance abuse cases.	
	I am capable of assessing domestic violence cases.	
	I am capable of saving and submitting case documentation in CAPS.	
	I understand the risk assessment tool and its differences from case disposition.	
	I am able to create service plans for families and children which meet the needs for permanency, safety, and well-being.	
	I have the adequate skills and knowledge to testify in court.	
	I understand the foster care system.	
	I know how to process a removal.	
	I know how to process a placement.	
	SU	My supervisor is available for me.
		My supervisor is a resource for me.
My supervisor provides guidance on managing my workload.		
My supervisor helps me to problem solve.		
I have received casework guidance from my supervisor.		
SA	I have received emotional support from my supervisor.	
	I am satisfied with the salary and pay.	
	I am satisfied with the benefits.	
	I am satisfied with the mission of child welfare.	
	I am satisfied that I have a manageable client caseload.	
	I am satisfied that I have a manageable paperwork load.	
	I am satisfied that I have a manageable computer workload.	
	I am satisfied with the educational opportunities.	
	I am satisfied with the promotion and career opportunities.	
	I am satisfied that I feel valued as a professional.	
	I am satisfied that I have the resources to do an adequate job.	
I am satisfied with the training opportunities.		
I am satisfied with the Organizational Support.		

Note. SE represents work related self-efficacy, SU represents supervisor's support, SA represents job satisfaction, STAY represents the desire to stay in CPS.

information in Table 2. The Demographic characteristics reported in this study include: gender, ethnicity, major in college, received a Title IV-E stipend, years in child welfare, and years as social worker.

**Table 2**  
Demographic information N = 455.

Characteristics	Percentage/M	Frequency/SD
Gender		
Male	13.80	63
Female	85.70	390
Missing	0.40	2
Ethnicity		
American Indian	0.40	2
Asian	1.10	5
Black	24.40	111
Hispanic	22.60	103
White	49.60	227
Other	0.90	4
Missing	0.60	3
Major		
Social work	26.60	121
Psychology	21.50	98
Sociology	28.60	130
Business	5.50	25
Medical	1.30	6
Political	1.50	7
Education	2.40	11
Humanities	6.60	30
Other	3.70	17
Missing	2.20	10
Title IV-E		
Yes	10.10	46
No	82.60	376
Missing	7.30	33
Years in child welfare	1.60	3.42
Years as social worker	2.19	3.81

3.2. Job satisfaction, supervisor's support, and self-efficacy

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) with three between-subjects factors was adopted to explore the main effects of three independent variables. Findings showed that variables of job satisfaction [ $F(1, 447) = 30.30, p < .001$ ], supervisor's support [ $F(1, 447) = 47.07, p < .001$ ], and self-efficacy [ $F(1, 447) = 22.86, p < .001$ ] had significant main effects on the dependent variable suggesting that worker's job satisfaction, perception of supervisor's support, and work related self-efficacy significantly influenced worker's desire to remain in CPS. Consistent with our prediction, better job satisfaction ( $M = 3.67$ ), supervisor's support ( $M = 3.71$ ) and self-efficacy ( $M = 3.65$ ) had significant greater means of the dependent variable (desire to stay) compared to less job satisfaction ( $M = 3.33$ ), supervisor's support ( $M = 3.29$ ) and self-efficacy ( $M = 3.36$ ).

Additionally, findings indicated a significant interaction between supervisor's support and self-efficacy [ $F(1, 447) = 6.05, p < .05$ ]. Further simple main effect analysis for this interaction showed that supervisor's support had greater influence for low self-efficacy workers on their desire to stay [ $F(1, 217) = 53.75, p < .001$ ] as compared to high self-efficacy workers [ $F(1, 234) = 29.32, p < .001$ ], suggesting the different effect magnitudes of supervisor's support for workers of different levels of work related self-efficacy. This particular finding revealed that although supervisor's support significantly influenced worker's desire to stay, the effect was greater for workers of low self-efficacy than to workers of high self-efficacy (see Table 3 for the means of two groups).

Findings also indicated a significant interaction between job satisfaction and self-efficacy [ $F(1, 447) = 10.98, p < .01$ ]. Further simple main effect analysis for this interaction indicated that job satisfaction showed greater influence for high self-efficacy workers [ $F(1, 234) = 50.57, p < .001$ ] as compared to low self-efficacy workers [ $F(1, 217) = 9.68, p < .01$ ], suggesting the different effect magnitudes of job satisfaction for workers of different levels of work related self-efficacy. This particular finding showed that while job satisfaction significantly influenced worker's desire to stay, it had greater impact for high self-efficacy workers than to low self-efficacy workers (please refer to Table 3 for the means of two groups). However, inconsistent with our hypothesis, we did not obtain significant interaction effects between job satisfaction and supervisor's support [ $F(1, 447) < 1$ ].

In the present study, we obtained a significant three way interaction among three variables [ $F(1, 447) = 9.96, p < .01$ ]. Further simple main effect analyses for this interaction indicated that the effect of Job Satisfaction was significant under the combinations of low supervisor's support/high self-efficacy [ $F(1, 32) = 11.77, p < .01$ ], high supervisor's support/high self-efficacy [ $F(1, 200) = 27.84, p < .001$ ], and high supervisor's support/low self-efficacy [ $F(1, 123) = 8.62, p < .01$ ], but not for the combination of low supervisor's support/low self-efficacy [ $F(1, 92) < 1$ ]. This finding suggested the different effect magnitudes of job satisfaction under different levels of combinations of work related self-efficacy and supervisor's support. We found that job satisfaction failed to improve the desire to stay for workers of low supervisor's support and low self-efficacy, although it did influence worker's desire to stay under other levels of combinations of supervisor's support and self-efficacy. The means of dependent variable under

**Table 3**  
Means of DV under different levels of SE.

	LSE	HSE
HSU	3.64	3.82
LSU	3.07	3.35
HSA	3.55	3.93
LSA	3.29	3.51

Note. DV = dependent variable, H = high, L = low, SU = supervisor support, SE = work related self-efficacy, SA = job satisfaction.

**Table 4**  
Means of DV under different combinations of research variables.

	LSA	HSA
LSU*LSE	3.08	3.07
LSU*HSE	3.13	3.90
HSU*LSE	3.50	3.78
HSU*HSE	3.63	3.93

Note. DV = dependent variable, H = high, L = low, \* = combine, SU = supervisor support, SE = work related self-efficacy, SA = job satisfaction.

different combination of supervisor's support and self-efficacy are presented in Table 4.

#### 4. Discussion

In general, consistent with the literature, the present study found that job satisfaction, supervisors' support and worker's self-efficacy were substantial factors associated with worker retention (e.g., Weiner, 1980; Fryer et al., 1989; Phillips et al., 1991; Stremmel, 1991; Samantrai, 1992; Rycraft, 1994; Gibbs, 2001; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003, 2007). Furthermore, we advanced current knowledge with the interaction findings showing that job satisfaction had greater influence on high self-efficacy workers with regard to their desire to stay; while supervisors' support had greater influence on low self-efficacy workers in relation to the desire to stay.

In fact, the significant impact of one's self-efficacy identified in this study has been suggested in the literature. It is believed that a substantial relationship exists between individuals' self-efficacy and work (e.g., Bandura, 1997). In the face of difficulties, high self-efficacy individuals are prone to exhibit low emotional arousal and adopt problem solve coping, whereas, low self-efficacy individuals more easily exhibit reactive emotions (Bandura, 1982). Hence, individuals' work related self-efficacy predicts both one's perseverance in difficult field and whether one would withdraw from work (Bandura, 1997). Specifically, research suggests high self-efficacy individuals are more perseverant in the work field due to suffering less from emotional exhaustion (Lo Schiavo, 1996), and work stress/job strains (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Grau et al., 2001). Inferring from the literature, we figure in the present study, workers of higher work related self-efficacy may perceive their working environments to be less demanding and more controllable as compared to workers of low work related self-efficacy.

Therefore, when it comes to decide how much they would like to remain in CPS, high self-efficacy workers may less likely to consider work stress, but are prone to consider how much they are satisfied with this job. Thus, this may explain why the present study found that in terms of the desire to stay; high self-efficacy workers responded more to job satisfaction than low self-efficacy workers. On the other hand, literature suggests workers who are lower in their work related self-efficacy are prone to perceive greater work stress and exhibit greater emotional arousal (Lo Schiavo, 1996; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Grau et al., 2001). Because supervisors are found by prior research that they are able to help workers reducing stress in relation to worker retention (Moen & Yu, 2000), we figure this may explain why the present study found that in terms of the desire to stay, low self-efficacy workers responded more to supervisors' support than high self-efficacy workers. In fact, the relation between supervisors and child welfare staff retention has repeatedly been discussed in prior research (e.g., Kleinpeter et al., 2003; Landsman, 2007). In addition to stress reduction, supervisors are found to be able to improve worker's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Gibbs, 2001), they also are able to provide workers guidance for practice (Rycraft, 1994). Consistent with findings of prior research, the present study confirmed the importance of supervisor's support to worker's desire to stay, additionally, the present study further identified the

interaction between supervisors' support and worker's self-efficacy and found that the influence of supervisors' support was particularly important to low self-efficacy workers.

Finally, the interaction finding revealed that job satisfaction failed to influence worker's desire to stay, when workers concurrently exhibited lower beliefs in their working ability and perceived lower support from the supervisors. This finding suggests that having a satisfying work environment may not be sufficient to encourage child welfare workers to stay. Both worker's work related self-efficacy and supervisor's support are important factors to catalyze the effect of job satisfaction on influencing worker's desire to stay.

This finding has two implications for worker retention. First, it suggests that recruiting workers with appropriate education or encouraging workers to acquire necessary professional skills, such as: attending in-service professional trainings (Lieberman, Hornby, & Russell, 1988; Gleeson, 1992; Jones & Okamura, 2000) may enhance worker's work related self-efficacy thus improve worker's willingness to stay when agencies already have a satisfying work environment. Second, the finding suggests that supervisors' support is an important factor to retain low self-efficacy workers. Due to the significant issue of staff turnover (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Ellett, 2001; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003, 2007), the workforce of child welfare may consist of new and inexperienced workers. Compared to experienced workers, new workers have shorter years of professional experiences hence they may be prone to exhibit lower work related self-efficacy. The present finding suggests that supportive supervision is particularly important to retain such workers so that without sufficient supervisors' support, even if agencies already have a satisfying work environment, workers will not necessarily choose to stay in the agency.

In all, the present study tried to advance current knowledge of child welfare worker retention with the exploration of the interaction effects among retention relevant factors. Our findings revealed that the interaction effects did exist so that workers of different level of work related self-efficacy responded differently to job satisfaction and supervisors' support in terms of their desire to stay. Although improving job satisfaction was found to effectively improve worker's desire to remain in CPS, it is only true when workers exhibiting high work related self-efficacy. Workers who are lower in work related self-efficacy seems to require an environment of supportive supervision to encourage them to stay. In light of the significant turnover issue in child welfare, the characteristics of the majority child welfare staff members may be new, inexperienced, hence are likely to exhibit lower work related self-efficacy.

Findings of the present study suggest that supportive supervision is particularly important to retain such workers; hence, it cannot be overlooked to improve child welfare worker retention. It needs to be noted that, due to the nature of survey research, the present finding is under the influence of missing data, hence, we recommend to exercise caution in explaining the findings. Furthermore, the present study is correlational in nature, any causal relationship inferred among the research variables needs to be stated with caution. Overall, the present study advances the knowledge of child welfare worker retention by exploring the interaction effect among retention relevant factors. The present findings may serve as referent knowledge for child welfare worker retention. In light of the significant interaction findings identified by the present study, we suggest the need to examine the interaction effects among retention predictors in future research.

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